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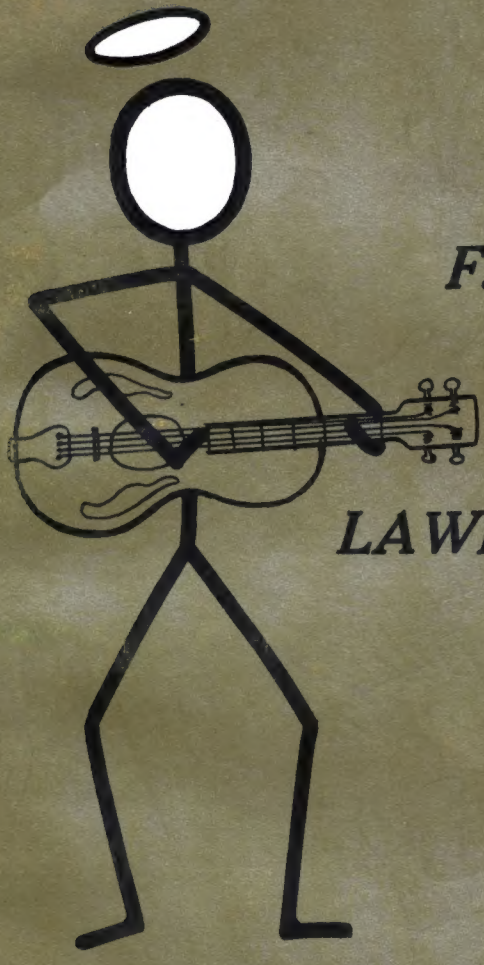
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS



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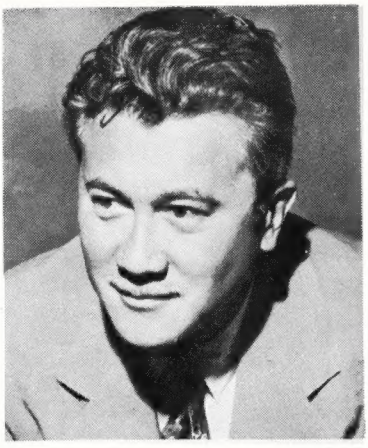
SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION



Many years ago, on one of those wonderful old lumbering Boeing Stratocruisers flying up from Nassau to London, a passenger who had boarded earlier handed me a Jamaica newspaper folded for me to read a report of a boxing soiree down there, and particularly a paragraph about "Ewart (Pottie) Potgieter, South Africa's 7-foot 2-inch 318-pounder who beat Simon Templar of Jamaica. Templar, who suffered a cut eye in the fifth, retired at the end of the sixth round. He weighed 236 lbs."

I have kept the cutting ever since, hoping that some day this Simon Templar might be a genuine contender for the world title, having trained down a bit — at 236 lbs. he sounded a bit overweight, and should have been reminded that the Saint always stripped to about 180. But I have at last resigned myself to the fact that unless he is a still undistinguished Archie Moore he must be getting too old by now; and maybe he never had what it takes anyhow, for the Saint would never have retired, even for a cut eye, or indeed allowed himself to be beaten at all. As you can imagine, it has been no fun for me to live with the fact that a Simon Templar suffered this public defeat, even at the hands of a giant with such a wondrous name as Ewart (Pottie) Potgieter, which I could never have improved on if I had written the script, although there would certainly have been a different ending.

Whether that pugilist's real name was Simon Templar I may never know, though I have my doubts. I think he probably chose it as a compliment to our hero, as I believe a somewhat more successful fighter in America picked the nom de guerre of Rory Calhoun, which may sometimes cause confusion with the other young man of that name who thespiates in movies and TV — although the latter's grounds for complaint may be more flimsy, since he was originally named Francis McGowan. I am only sorry that the boxing Templar was not able to contribute as much glory to the name as, say, a lovely and talented young woman who is billed as Eva Marie Saint, who could not punch her way out of an ice-cream cone but performs in other ways much better.

This name-changing business leads to endless problems. It is all right if one Leslie Hope prefers not to share a name with me, and calls himself Bob. I have a good friend of many years called Jack Horner, who never felt he had to get out of that corner. It gets more complicated when a man really named James Stewart finds another Jimmy Stewart entrenched in Hollywood before him and has to call himself Stewart Granger. And although I was at first alarmed when people began to ask me if I was related to an English writer named Hugo Charteris, I was relieved to see reviews saying things like "Mr. Charteris has enormous gifts as an intuitive novelist", which I hope some readers will confuse with me; and after reading his The Lifeline I am very happy to welcome him to the name.

But I do tremble to think of what can happen when I pick up my newspaper, as I did once, and see a picture of Douglas Fairbanks Jr. at dinner in a Palm Beach restaurant with a friend, Joseph P. Lubotta, and an attractive young lady whose name is given (I solemnly swear) as Miss Mickey Spillane.

Leslie Charteris

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the hopeless heiress

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SIMON TEMPLAR saw her again as he was sampling the *Chausson du Roi* at La Petite Auberge at Noves.

A *chausson* means, literally, a bedroom slipper; hence, in the vocabulary of French cuisine, it is also the word for a sort of apple turnover, which bears a superficial resemblance to a folded slipper with the heel tucked into the toe. The *Chausson du Roi,* however, as befits its royal distinction, is not a dessert, and contains nothing so commonplace as apples. It envelopes sweetbreads liberally blended with the regal richness of truffles, and it is one of the specially famous entrees of the Petite Auberge, whose name so modestly means only "the little inn", but which is one of the mere dozen restaurants in all France decorated by the canonical *Guide Michelin* with the three stars which are its highest accolade. Noves is in the south, not far from Avignon of the celebrated bridge, and is a very small village of absolutely no importance except to its nearest neighbors, which hardly anyone else would ever have heard of but for the procession of gourmets, beating a path to a superior

SHE WAS "THE GIRL WHO HAD EVERYTHING" – EXCEPT WHAT SHE NEEDED MOST–AND THE SAINT DECIDED TO REMEDY THAT.

munch-trap. And she personified one rather prevalent concept of the type to be expected in such company.

She had truly brown hair, the rare and wonderful natural color of the finest leather, styled with careless simplicity, with large brown eyes to match, a small nose, a generous mouth, and exquisitely even teeth, all assembled with a symmetry that might have been breath-taking — if it had been seen in a slightly concave mirror.

Because she was fat.

Simon estimated that she probably scaled about 180 pounds bone dry, the same as himself. Except that his pounds were all muscle stretched over more than two yards of frame, whereas she had to carry too many of them horizontally, with a head less height, in billows of rotundity that might have delighted Rubens but would have appalled Vargas. It was a great pity, he thought, for without that excess weight even her figure might have been beautiful: her ankles were still trim and her calves not too enlarged, and her hands were small and shapely. But from the way she was tucking into the provender on her plate there seemed to be little prospect of her central sections being restored to proportion with her extremities.

She wore no ring on the third finger of her left hand, and the man with her was certainly old enough to be her father, but there was no physical similarity between them. He was gray-haired and gray-eyed, with a thin meticulously sculptured gray mustache; and the rest of him also as thin as she was obese. But nothing else about him confirmed the ascetic promise of his slenderness. To mitigate the warmth of the summer evening, his dark gray suit had been custom tailored of some special fabric, perhaps even custom woven, which combined the conventionally imperative drabness of correct male attire with the obvious lightness of a tissue of feathers; his snowy shirt was just solid enough to be opaque without pretending to be as substantial as the least useful handkerchief; his cuff-links were cabochon emeralds no bigger than peanuts, and his wrist watch was merely one different link in a broad loose bracelet which anyone without Simon Templar's assayer's eye would have dismissed as Mexican silver instead of the solid platinum that it was. In every detail, examined closely enough, there was revealed a man who craved nothing but the best of everything — but with a discrimination refined to the ultimate snobbery of modesty.

Simon seized a chance to satisfy his curiosity when the dining-room hostess (he had noted

an increasing number of personable and competent young women in such posts of recent years, and wondered if it would be correct to call them *maitresses d'hotel*) came by to inquire whether everything was to his pleasure.

"At the corner table?" she said, answering his return question. "That is Mr. Saville Wakerose. I should have thought you would know him. Isn't he one of your greatest gourmets?"

The Saint had never set eyes on Mr. Wakerose before that summer, but the name was instantly familiar, and at once it became hardly a coincidence at all that they should have been eating in the same restaurants on three consecutive days — the Cote d'Or at Saulieu, the Pyramide at Vienne, and now the Petite Auberg at Noves. For each one was a three-starred shrine of culinary art, and they were spaced along the route from Paris to the Mediterranean at distances which could only suggest an irresistible schedule to any gastrophilic pilgrim with the time to spare. In which category Simon Templar was an enthusiastic amateur when other obligations and temptations permitted; but Saville Wakerose was a dean of professionals. In twenty years of magazine articles, newspaper columns, lecture tours, and general publicity, he had established his authority as a connoisseur of food and wine and an arbiter of general elegance at such an altitude that even princess and presidents were reported to cringe from his critiques of their hospitality. And he had not merely parlayed his avocation into a comfortable living in which the best things in life were free or deductible, but he had climaxed it some four years ago by marrying the former Adeline Inglis, the last scion of one of those pre-welfare-state fortunes, who in her debutante days had inspired ribald parodists to warble:

Sweet Adeline,
For you I pine;
Your dough divine
Should mate with mine. . .

Since then she had had five or six husbands, in spite of whom she still had plenty of dough left when Saville Wakerose added himself to the highly variegated roster. He was to be the last of the list; for a couple of years later, before the habitual rift could develop in their marital bliss, a simple case of influenza followed by common pneumonia suddenly retired her for all time from the matrimonial market, leaving him presumably well consoled in his bereavement.

"He has a very young wife," Simon observed, with intentional discretion.

"That is not his wife. She is his *belle-fille*, Miss Flane."

Belle-fille does not mean what

it might suggest to anyone with a mere smattering of French. The fat girl was Wakerose's step-daughter. And with that information another card spun out of the Saint's mental index of trivial recollections from his catholic acquaintance with all forms of journalism. One of Adeline Inglis' earliest husbands, and the father of her only experiment in maternity, had been Orlando Flane, a film star who had shone in the last fabulous days before Hollywood became only a suburb instead of the capital of the moving picture world.

That, then, would have to be the one-time photographers' darling Rowena Flane, whose father had never had much talent and was rated nothing but an alcoholic problem after the divorce, and who blew out what was left of his brains soon afterwards, but who had left her those still discernible traits of the sheer impossible beauty which had made him the idol of millions of sex-starved females before their fickle frustrations transferred themselves to the school of scratching, mumbling, or jittering goons who had succeeded him.

Adeline Inglis, Simon seemed to recall, searching his memory for the imprint of some inconsequentional news photo, had taken advantage of the best coiffeurs, courturiers, and cosmeticians that money could buy to succeeed in looking like a nice well-groomed middle-class matron dolled up for a community bridge party. Her daughter, fortuitously endowed with a far better basic structure, had not given it a fraction of that break. But he wondered why somebody close to her hadn't pointed out that even if she suffered from some glandular misfortune, there were better treatments for it than to indulge her appetite as she seemed inclined to do. Most especially somebody like Saville Wakerose, who through all his professional gourmandizing had taken obvious pride in preserving the figure of an esthete.

And from that not so casual speculation began an incident which brought the Saint to the brink of a fate worse than . . . But let us not be jumping the gun.

Although he had never been so crude as to even glance towards Rowena Flane and her step-father while making his inquiries, Simon knew that the recognition had been mutual; and when the hostess's peregrinations took her to the corner table he had no doubt that some equally sophisticated inquiry was made about himself. But he would not have predicted that it would have the result it did.

It was one of those mild and ideal evenings in May, when summer often begins in Prov-

ence, and after succumbing to an exquisite miniature *Souffle au Grand Marnier* he was happy to accede to the suggestion of having his coffee served outside under the trees. Wakerose and Rowena had started and finished before him, and were already at a table on the front terrace which Simon had to pass in search of one for himself; and Mr. Wakerose stood up and said: "Excuse me, Mr. Templar. We seem destined to keep crossing paths on this trip. Why not give in to it and join us?"

"Why not?" Simon said agreeably, but looked at the fat girl for his cue.

She smiled her indorsement with a readiness which suggested that the invitation could actually have been her idea.

"Thank you," Simon said, and sat down beside her.

Liqueurs came with the coffee – a Benedictine for her, a Chatelaine Armagnac for Mr. Wakerose. Simon decided to join him in the latter.

"It makes an interesting change," Mr. Wakerose. "And I like to enjoy the libations of the territory, wherever they are reasonably potable. And after all, we are nowhere near Cognac, but much nearer the latitude of Bordeaux."

"And those black-oak Gascon casks make all the difference from ageing in the *limousins*," Simon concurred, tasting appreciately. "I think it takes a harder and drier brandy to follow the more rugged wines of the Rhone – like this."

As an exercise in one-upmanship it was perhaps a trifle flashy, but he had the satisfaction of seeing Saville Wakerose blink.

"Are you just on the trail of food and drink?" Rowena asked. "Or is it something more exciting?"

"Just eating my way around," said the Saint carelessly, having accustomed himself to these gambits as a formality that had to be suffered with good humor. "That can be exciting enough, in places like this."

"You sound as if you'd evolved a formula for handling silly questions. But I suppose you've had to."

It was Simon's turn to blink– though he was sufficiently on guard, from instinct and habit, to permit himself no more than a smile. But it was a smile warmed by the surprised recognition of a perceptivity which he had been guilty of failing to expect from a poor little fat rich girl.

"You've probably had to do the same, haven't you?" he said, and it was almost an apology.

" It appears that we all know each other," Mr. Wakerose observed drily. "Although I did forget the ceremonial introductions. But I'm sure Mr. Templar

made the same subtle inquiries about us that we made about him."

Simon realized that Wakerose was also a gamesman, and nodded his sporting acknowledgement of the ploy.

"Doesn't everybody?" he returned blandly. "However, I was telling the truth. The only clues I'm following are in menus. I stopped looking for trouble years ago — because quite enough of it started looking for me."

Saville Wakerose trimmed his cigar.

"We haven't only been eating our way around, as you put it, in all those places where you've been seeing us," he said. "We've also been seeing all the historic sights. Are you familiar with the history of these parts, Mr. Templar?"

Simon joyously spotted the trap from afar.

"Only what I've read in the guide-books, like everyone else," he said, skirting it neatly and leaving the other to follow.

Wakerose just as gracefully sidestepped his own pitfall.

"Rowena loves history, or at least historical novels," he explained, "and I prefer to read cook boks. But I let her drag me around the ancient monuments, and she lets me show her the temples of the table, and it makes an interesting symbiosis."

It was a stand-off, like two duellists stopped by a mutual discovery of respect for the other's skill, and accepting a tacit truce while deciding how — or whether — to continue.

Simon was perfectly content to leave it that way. He turned to Rowena again with a new friendliness, and said: "Historical novels cover a lot of ground, between deluges — from the Flood to Prohibition. Do you like all of 'em, or are you hooked on any particular period?"

"It's not the period so much as as the atmosphere," she said. "When I want to relax and be entertained, I want romance and glamor and a happy ending. I can't stand this modern obsession with everything sordid and complicated and depressing."

"But you don't think life only started to be sordid and depressing less than a hundred years ago?"

"Of course not. I know that in many ways it was much worse. But for some reason, when writers look at the world around them they only seem to see the worst of it, or that's all they want to talk about. But when they look back, they bring out the best and the happiest things."

"And that's all you want to see?"

"Yes, if I'm paying for it. Why spend money to be depressed?"

"I could see your point," Simon said deliberately, "if you were a poor struggling working

girl with indigent parents and a thriftless husband, dreaming of an escape she'll never have. But if we put the cards on the table, and pretend we know who you are — why do you need that escape?"

Wakerose had suddenly begun to beam like an emaciated Buddha.

"This is prodigious," he said. "Mr. Templar is putting you on, Rowena."

"I didn't mean to," Simon said quickly, but without taking his eyes off her. "It was meant as an honest question."

"Then you tell me honestly," she said, "why a rich girl with no worries shouldn't prefer to dream about knights in shining armor or dashing cavaliers, instead of the kind of men she sees all the time."

"Because she should be sophisticated enough to know that they're the only kind she could live with — or who could live with her. The day after this historical hero swept her off her feet, she'd start trying to housebreak him. She's decide that she couldn't stand the battered old tin suit he rescued her in, and take him down to the smithy for a new one, which she would pick for him. The cavalier who spreads his coat over a puddle for her to walk on with her dainty feet would find that she expected to repeat the performance at home while he was wearing it."

"Is that really what you think about women — or just about me, Mr. Templar?"

"It couldn't possibly be personal, Miss Flane, because I never had any reason to think about you before," said the Saint calmly and pleasantly. "It's what I think about most modern women, and especially American women. They want a lion as far as the altar, and a lap-dog from there on. They think that chivalry is a great wheeze for getting cigarettes lighted and doors opened and lots of alimony, but they insist that they're just as good as a man in every field where's there's no advantage in pleading feminity. So being accustomed to having the best of it both ways, they'd go running back to Mother or their lawyers if the fine swaggering male who swept them off their feet had the nerve to think he could go on being the boss after he'd carried them over the bridal threshold. The difference is that some motherless poor girls might figure it was better to put up with that horrible brute of a Prince than go back to being Cinderella, but the rich girl has no such problem."

Her big brown eyes darkened, but it was not with anger. And he was finding it a little less easy to meet her gaze.

"How do you know what oth-

er problems she has?" she retorted. "Or does being called the Robin Hood of Modern Crime make you feel you have to hate all rich people on principle?"

"Not for a moment," he said. "Some of my best friends are millionaires. I've even become fairly rich myself — not by your standards, of course, but enough so that nobody could write a check that'd make me do anything I didn't want to. Which is all I ever wanted."

"Well spoken, sir," murmured Wakerose with delighted irony. "Rowena will be glad to know that at last she's met one man who isn't a fortune hunter."

"Thank you," said the Saint. "At this stage of my chameleon career, it's cheering to find one crime I still haven't been accused of."

"I didn't mean to be rude with that Robin Hood crack," Rowena said. "It was meant as an honest question, like yours."

"And an understandable one," Simon said cheerfully. "So if you're worried about all the jewels you've got with you, I give you my word of honor I won't steal them while you're here. Where is your next stop?"

Wakerose chuckled again.

"I'm afraid we're staying here for at least a week, while Rowena explores all the ruins within reasonable driving range, before and after the luncheon stops which I shall select. I have convinced her that this is a much more civilized procedure than trying to combine transit with tourism, unpacking in a different hotel every night and having to pack up again every morning to set forth like gypsies without even a bathroom to call our own. Here we are assured of modern rooms and comfortable beds and clean clothes hung up in our closets, and returning in the evening is a relaxation instead of a scramble. So you will have left long before us."

"I knew there'd be a catch somewhere. So what are you planning to see tomorrow?"

"Nothing but a very unhistoric local garage, unfortunately. The fuel pump on my car elected to break down this afternoon — luckily, we were only just outside Chateaurenard. I expect to spend tomorrow spurring on the mechanic to get the repair finished by the end of the day and pretending I know exactly what he should be doing, while hoping that he will not detect my ignorance and take advantage of it to manufacture lengthy and expensive complications."

Simon could not have told anyone what made him do it, except that in a vague but superbly Saintly way it might have seemed too rare an opportunity to pass up, to take the wind out of Saville Wakerose's too meticulously trimmed sails; but he

said at once: "That sounds rather dull for Rowena. I'd be happy to take her sightseeing in my car, while you keep a stern eye on the mechanical shenanigans."

Rowena Flane stared at him from behind a mask that seemed to have been hastily and incompletely improvised to cover her total startlement.

"Why should you do that?" she asked.

He shrugged, with twinkling sapphires in his gaze.

"I hadn't any definite plans for tomorrow. And I told you I didn't have to do anything I didn't want to."

"We couldn't impose on you like that," Wakerose said. "Rowena has plenty of books to read —"

"It's no imposition. But if she'd feel very stuffy about being obligated to a stranger, and it would make her feel better, she can buy the gas."

"And the lunch," she said.

"Oh, no. You couldn't afford that. The lunch will be mine."

Suddenly she laughed.

She had an extra chin and ballooning bosoms to make a billowy travesty of her merriment; yet it had something that lighted up her face, which was in absolute contrast to her stepfather's polite and faultless smile.

And from that moment the Saint knew that his strange instinct had once again proved wiser than reason, and that he was not wasting his time . . .

She was half an hour late in the morning, but went far beyond perfunctory apologies when she finally came downstairs.

"I'm sure you'll think I'm always like this, and I don't blame you. But Saville promised to call me, and *he* overslept. I was furious. I think there's nothing more insulting to people than to make them wait for you. Who was it who said that 'Punctuality is the politeness of princes'?"

"I like the thought," Simon said. "Who was it?"

"I don't know. I wish I did."

"That makes me feel better already. Now I won't be quite so much in awe of your historical knowledge."

"Honestly, it's not as frightening as Saville tries to make out." She held up the Michelin volume Provence. "I just read the guide books, like you."

"All right," he said amiably, as he settled himself beside her at the wheel of his car, and opened a road map. "You name it, and I'll find it."

It was a busy morning. In spite of their belated start, they were able to walk the full circuit of the Promenade du Rocher around the Palace of the Popes in Avignon, enjoying its panoramas of the town and countryside and the immortal bridge which still goes only halfway across the Rhone, before

taking the hour-long guided tour of the Palace itself, which the Saint found anticlimactically dull, having no temperament for that sort of historical study. He endured the education with good grace, but was glad of the release when he could drive her over the modern highway across the river, a few kilometers out to the less pretentious cousin-town of Villeneuve-les-Avignon, for lunch at the *Prieure.*

It was not that she had made the sightseeing any more painful for him than it had to be – in fact, she had displayed an irreverence towards the more pompous exhibits which had encouraged his own iconoclastic sense of humor – but the bones of the past would never be able to compete for his interest with the flesh of the present, even when it was as excessive as Rowena Flane's.

The shaded garden restaurant was quiet and peaceful; and a Pernod and water with plenty of ice tinkling in the glass was simultaneously refreshing to the eye, the hand, the palate, and the soul.

"Of all civilized blessings," he remarked, "I think ice would be one of the hardest to give up. And you must admit that it improves even historical epics when you can watch them in an air-conditioned theater, and enjoy the poor extras sweating up the Pyramids while you sit and wish you'd worn a sweater."

"The Roman emperors had ice," she said. "They had it brought down from the Alps."

"So I've heard. A slave runner set out with a two-hundred-pound chunk, and arrived at the palace with an ice cube. I quess it was just as good as a Frigidaire if you were in the right set. But who daydreams about being a slave?"

"Unless she catches the eye of the handsome hero."

"I know," said the Saint. "The kind of part your father used to play so well."

He saw her stiffen, and the careless gaiety drained down from her eyes.

"Was anything wrong with that?" she challenged coldly.

"Nothing," he said disarmingly. "It was a job, and he did it damned well."

The head waiter came then, and they ordered the *crepes du Prieure,* the delicately stuffed rolled pancakes which he remembered from a past visit, and to follow them a *gigot a la broche aux herbes de Provence* which he knew could not fail them, with a bottle of Ste Roseline rose to counter the warmth of the day.

But after that interruption, she stubbornly refused its opportunity to change the subject.

"I suppose," she said deliberately, "you were like everyone

else. When he stopped playing those parts so well, you joined in calling him a drunken bum."

Simon made no attempt to evade the showdown.

"Eventually, that's what he was. It was a shame, when you remember what he did and what he looked like, before the juice wore him down. Unfortunately that was the only period when I knew him."

Her brown eyes darkened and tightened.

"You knew him?"

"So very slightly – and at the wrong time. Just before he committed suicide. I wish I'd known him before. He must have been quite a guy."*

She studied him suspiciously for several seconds, but he faced the probe just as frankly and unwaveringly as the preceding challenge.

"I'm glad you said that," she told him finally. "That's how I try to think of him. And I think you mean it."

"I'm glad you believe that," he answered. "Now I won't have spoiled your appetite. That would have been a crime, with what we're looking forward to. That's another department where I'd prefer to keep my history in the surroundings: food. When these walls around us were new, the *specialite de la maison* was probably something like boiled hair shirts. I'd love to see the face of a *Michelin* inspector being served the product of an ancient French kitchen. Did you know that it was about a century and a half after the Popes took their dyspepsia back from Avignon to Rome before the French learned the elements of the fancy cooking they're now so proud of?"

"Yes, I know. And it was another Italian who brought it – Catherine de' Medici, when she married Henri the Second and became queen of France. Saville taught me that –"

The conversation slanted off into diverting but safely impersonal byways which brought them smoothly through their two main courses and surprised the Saint with more discoveries of her range of knowledge and breadth of interests.

Of course, he remembered, she had had the advantage of the best tutors, conventional schools, and finishing schools that money could buy. But she was a living advertisement for the system. Sometimes she was so fluent and original that he found himself fascinated, listening as he might have listened to some prefabricated sex-pot with a press-agent's contrived and memorized line dialectic, completely forgetting how different she looked from anything like that.

*See the story *Hollywood* in THE SAINT GOES WEST.

On the other hand, having convinced herself of his sincerity, his attention seemed to draw her out to an extent that he would hardly have expected even when he had promised himself the attempt the night before. And as her defensiveness disappeared, it seemed to make room for a personal warmth towards him to grow in the same ratio, as if in gratitude for his help in letting down her guard.

A discreet interval after they had disposed of the last of the pink and succulent lamb, the head waiter was at the table again with his final temptations. Rowena unhesitatingly and ecstatically went for the *Charlotte Prieure* while the Saint was happy to settle for a fresh peach.

"I'm sure you think I'm awful," she said, "finishing all my potatoes and then topping them with this rich sweet goo. You're like Saville — you can enjoy all the tastiest things, and hold back on the fattening ones, and keep a figure like a saint. The hungry kind, I mean."

By this time they were on the verge of being old friends.

"I guess we're the worrying types," he said. "Or the vain ones. A longish while ago, I took a good look at some of the characters who had the same tastes that I have, and decided that I could beat the game. I wanted to live like them without looking like them. I figured that the solution might be to have your cake and not eat all of it. Anyway, it seemed like an idea."

"So you could always be young and beautiful, like Orlando in his prime."

"I should be so lucky. But there are worse things to try for."

"Such as being a fat slob like me."

"Not a slob," he said carefully. "But why don't you do something about being fat?"

"Because I can't," she said. "I know you think it's just because I eat too much. That's how it started, of course. When I was a child I felt unwanted, so I took to desserts and candy in the same way that people become alcoholics or drug addicts. The psychologists have a word for it. . . Then, in my teens, because I was so fat, I didn't get any dates, and the other girls always made fun of me. They were jealous of all the other things I had, and were just looking for something to torment me with. So I just stuffed myself with more desserts and candy, to show I didn't care. And so I ended up with adipochria."

"With who?"

"It means a *need* for fat. Just before my mother died, I'd finally started trying to go on a diet, and I'd lost some weight, but I began to feel awful. Tired all the time, and feeling sick after meals, and getting head-

aches constantly. So Saville took me to a specialist, and that's what he said it was. I'd conditioned my metabolism to so much rich food and sweets, all my life, that something glandular had atrophied and now I can't get along without them."

The Saint stared at her.

"And the remedy is to keep eating more of the same?"

"It isn't a remedy – it's a necessity. If I cut them out, it's like a normal person being starved. In a month or two I'd die of anemia and malnutrition."

"And that's all he could tell you? To stay fat and get fatter?"

"Just about. Well, he gave me a lot of pills, which he hopes will change my condition eventually. But he absolutely forbade me to try any more dieting until I feel a positive loathing for any sweet taste. He said that would be the first symptom that my system was starting to become normal."

Simon shook his head incredulously.

"That's the damnedest disease I ever heard of."

"Isn't it?" she said resignedly. "That's another reason why I escape into those historical romances. They're what I'll have to be satisfied with until some hero comes along who likes fat girls."

But there was a soft moistness in her eyes that he did not want to look at, and he concentrated on peeling a second peach.

"Why not?" he said. "The *Vogue* model type would never have got a tumble from any of those old-time swashbucklers, to go by the contemporary prints and paintings. They didn't need skinny little waifs to make them feel robust. And yet the interesting thing is that when it came to architecture they put up buildings that were big but graceful, and full of ornament, too much of it sometimes, but always delicate. No huge lumpish monstrosities like some of the modern jobs I've seen. Talking of which, what ancient memorials are we heading for this afternoon?"

"I wanted to see the Pont du Gard at Uzes, and . . ."

And once again the conversation was steered back into a safe impersonal channel.

He drove to Uzes and parked down beside the river, and they walked to survey the magnificent Roman aqueduct from both levels and across the span. Then it was only another fifteen miles to Nimes, where they parked in front of the extraordinarily preserved Arenas, which could still have served as a movie set if they had backgrounded chariots instead of Citroens, and walked on up the Boulevard Victor Hugo to visit the somewhat disappointing Maison Carree, and then on to the Jardin de la Fontaine for the view from the Tour Magne, which – But this is not the script of a

travelog. Let us leave it that they walked a lot and saw a lot which has no direct bearing on this story, and that the Saint was not truly sorry when they came to Tarascon on the way home and found it was too late to visit the Chateau, though it was picturesque enough from the outside.

"I'll have to make it another day," Rowena said. "I couldn't go away without seeing it. *Tartarin de Tarascon* was the first French classic I had to read in school, and I can still remember that it made me cry, I was so sorry for the poor silly man."

"Don Quijote was another poor silly man," Simon said. "And so am I, maybe. Lord, have mercy on such as we — as the song says. But thank the Lord, a few people do. . . . Why did you feel an unwanted child?" he asked abruptly.

She took about a mile to answer, so that he began to think she was resenting the question; but she was only brooding around it.

"I suppose because I never seemed to have any parents like the other girls. I had a series of stepfathers who sometimes pretended to be interested in me, but that was only to impress Mother. They weren't really fatherly types, and they soon stopped when they found that she couldn't have cared less. Motherhood was something she had to try once, like everything else, so she tried it; but after a few years it was just another bore. So I was pushed on to governesses and tutors and all kinds of boarding schools — anything to keep me out of her hair. And yet she must have loved me, in a funny way, or else she still had a strong sense of duty."

"Why — how did she show it?"

"Well, she did leave me everything in her will. I don't get control of it until I get married or until I'm thirty — until then, Saville's my guardian and trustee — but in the end it all comes to me."

It went through the Saint's head like the breaking of a string on some supernal harp, the reverberation which is vulgarly rendered as "boinng," but amplified to the volume of a cathedral bell as it would sound in the belfry.

He didn't look at her. He couldn't.

But she had spoken in perfect innocence. His ears told him that.

His hands were light on the wheel, and the car had not swerved. The moment of understanding had only been vertiginous in his mind, exactly as its subsonic boom had sounded in no other ears.

"You get on better with Saville than the other stepfathers, I take it."

"Well, I was a lot older when he came along, so he didn't have to pretend to like children. As a matter of fact, he loathes them. But he's been very good to me."

"I'm sure there's a moral," Simon said trivially. "We're always reading about misunderstood children, but you don't hear much about misunderstood parents. And yet all parents were children themselves once. I wonder why they forget how to communicate when they change places."

"I must try to remember, if I'm ever a mother."

It was only another half-hour's drive back to the Petite Auberge, and he was glad it was no longer.

He had a little thinking to do alone, and there would not be much time for it.

As they turned in at the entrance and headed up the long driveway through the orchards, she said: "It's been a wonderful day. For me. And you must have been terribly bored."

"On the contrary, I wouldn't have missed it for anything," he said truthfully.

"I might have believed you if you'd let me pay for lunch. But that crack of yours, that I couldn't afford it — it still sticks in my mind. You meant something snide, didn't you?"

He brought the car to a gentle stop in front of the inn.

"I meant that if I let you buy my lunch you might have thought you could buy more than that, and then I'd 've had to prove how expensive I can be to people I don't like. And I'd begun to like you."

"Then do you still like me enough to join us for dinner, if Saville pays?"

He smiled.

"Consider me seduced."

She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek, and got out before he could open the door.

The Saint shaved and showered and changed unhurriedly, and sauntered out on to the terrace to find Saville Wakerose sipping a dry martini.

"Hi there," he said breezily. "How's the ailing automobile?"

"Immobile," Wakerose said lugubriously. "May I offer you one of these? They really make them quite potably here."

"Thank you." Simon sat down. "What's the trouble — did the mechanic outsmart you?"

"The mountebank took the fuel pump apart and found something broken which he couldn't repair. We went all over the province looking for something to replace it with, but being an American car nobody had anything that would fit. Finally I had to telephone the dealers in Paris and have them put a new pump on the train, which won't get to Avignon till tomorrow morning. And after he picks

it up, the charlatan at the garage will probably take at least half the day to install it."

"Aren't you being a bit hard on him?" Simon argued. "You'd be liable to run into the same thing if you took a French car into a small-town American garage. Just like they say you should drink the wine of the country, I believe in driving the car of the country you're in, or at least of the continent."

"When they make air-conditioned cars in Europe," Wakerose said earnestly, I shall have to consider one."

Simon had forgotten during the course of the day that Wakerose was a lifeman who never stopped playing, but he accepted the loss of a round with great good nature and without any undignified scramble to retrieve it. He could afford now to bide his time.

Rowena gave him the first opening, as he knew she must, when she came down and joined them.

"I suppose you've heard the news," she said. "Isn't it aggravating?"

"Not to me," Simon said cheerily.

"I know, you can take your sightseeing or leave it alone. But tomorrow is market day in Arles, and I've read that it's one of the biggest and best in all the South, and it's heartbreaking to miss it — "

"Can't you hire a car?"

"I've been trying to make inquiries," Wakerose said. "But this isn't exactly Hertz territory. And I can't send Rowena off with some local taxi-driver who doesn't speak English, in an insanitary rattletrap —"

"Which might break down anywhere, like the best American limousine," Simon said sympathetically. "I see your problem. But if Rowena could stand another day in my non-air-conditioned Common-Market jalopy, I'd be glad to offer an encore."

It was extraordinary how beautiful her face was, when you looked at it centrally and the dim light made the outer margins indefinite, especially when that luminous warmth rose in her eyes.

"It's too much!" she said. "I know how you hate that sort of thing, and yet you know I'll just have to take you up on it. How can you be such an angel?"

"It comes naturally to a saint," he drawled. "And I get my kick out of seeing the kick you get out of everything. As I told you last night, I'm not on any timetable, and another day makes no difference to me."

"A rare and remarkable attitude in these days," Wakerose said, "when anyone who claims to be respectable is supposed to have a Purpose In Life, no matter how idiotic. I envy you your freedom from that bourgeois

problem. But not your marketing excursion tomorrow. Rowena will quite certainly transmute you from a cavalier into a beast of burden, laden with every gewgaw and encumbrance that attracts her fancy. You need not try to look chivalrously skeptical, Mr. Templar. I have been with her to the Flea Market in Paris."

"I promise," Rowena said. "Anything I buy I'll carry myself."

"And don't think I won't hold you to that," Simon grinned at her.

"You've got a witness," she smiled back.

Wakerose heaved a sigh of tastefully controlled depth.

"You must both rest your feet at the Jules Cesar," he said. "It is right in the middle of the main street, and as I recall it they serve a most edible lunch. And Rowena should appreciate a hotel named after such a genuine historical hero instead of some parvenu tycoon as they usually are in America. Come to think of it, I believe there are six or seven different towns called Rome in the United States, and I'll wager that not one of them has even a motel called the Julius Caesar."

The conversation continued with light and random variety through dinner.

Characteristically, Wakerose suggested Parma ham and melon for a start, followed by flamed quail and a green salad, to which Simon was quite contented to agree; but for Rowena it was *foie gras* to begin with, and then chicken in a cream sauce with tarragon, and *pommes Dauphine.*

"I would propose a glass of Chante Alouette '59 for all of us to start with," Wakerose said, studying the wine list, "and Rowena can finish the bottle with her chicken. You and I, Mr. Templar, can wash down our *cailles* with a red Rhone. Do you have any preference? They have a most impressive selection here. Or are you one of those people to whom all Chateauneuf du Pape is the same?"

"The Montredon is very good, I think," Simon said, without glancing at the list. "Especially the '55."

The meal ended with the score about even and all the amenities observed, though by the end of it the Saint thought there was an infinistesimal fraying at the edges of Wakerose's cultivated smoothness, and thought that he could surmise the reason. It was not that Wakerose would be seriously exasperated to have encountered an adversary who could meet him on level terms in his own specialty of going one better. Something more important seemed to preoccupy him, and the strain was cramping his style.

For dessert, Wakerose chose

an almost calorie-free sorbet, but clairvoyantly anticipated Rowena's yearning for the *crepes flambees* which the Petite Auberge, proud of its own recipe, disdains to call *Suzette*. But this time the Saint decided that he had been dietetically discreet enough all day, and could afford the indulgence of leaving Wakerose alone in his austerity.

"I'm so glad you can at least pretend to dissipate with me," Rowena said glowingly. "It makes me feel just a little less of a freak, even if you're only doing it to be polite, I love you for it."

Wakerose looked at her oddly.

"Mr. Templar has that wonderful knack of making everybody feel like somebody special," he commented. "It must have required superhuman will-power for him to remain a bachelor."

"Maybe I just haven't been lucky yet," Simon said easily. "I'm corny enough to be stuck with the old romantic notion that for every person there's an ideal mate wandering somewhere in the world; and when they meet, the bells ring and things light up and there's no argument. The *coup de foudre*, as the French call it. Some people settle for less, or too soon, and some people never find it, but that doesn't prove that it can't happen."

His gaze shifted once from Wakerose to Rowena and back again, as it might in any normal generality of discussion, but he knew that her eyes never left his face.

"One might call it the *Some Enchanted Evening* syndrome," Wakerose said sardonically. "Well, each of us to our superstitions. I cling to the one which maintains that brandy or a liqueur at the end of a meal is a digestive, although I know that medical authority contradicts me. Rowena enjoys a Benedictine. What would appeal to you?"

"I shall be completely neutral," said the Saint, "and have a B-and-B."

They took their coffee and liquers outside on the terrace. Rowena ordered her coffee in a large cup, *liegeois*, with a dollop of ice cream in it, and used it to swallow a pill from a little jewelled box; but the caffeine was not sufficient to stop her contributions to the conversational rally becoming more and more infrequent and desultory, and Wakerose had still not finished his long cigar when she stifled a yawn and excused herself.

"I'm folding," she said. "And I want to be bright tomorrow. Will you forgive me?" She stood up and gave her hand to the Saint, and he kissed it with an impudent flourish. "Thank you again for today – and what time does the private tour leave in the morning?"

"Shall we say ten o'clock again?"

"You're the boss. And tonight I'll leave my own call at the desk, so you won't be kept waiting. Goodnight, Saville."

Wakerose tracked her departure with elegantly lofted eyebrows, and made a fastidious business of savoring another puff of smoke.

"My felicitations," he said at last. "You appear to have her marvellously intimidated, which is no mean feat. But I would advise you, if I may, not to presume too much on this docility. I've seen it before, and I feel I have a duty to warn you. Behind that submissiveness there lurks a tiger which even professional hunters have mistaken for a fat cat."

There was an inherent laziness in the balmy Provencal evening which allowed the Saint to take a long leisurely pause before any answer was essential, which helped to cushion the abruptness of the transition he had to make.

"There was something I wanted to talk to you about," he said, "but not quite as publicly as this." He turned his head from side to side to indicate the other guests at adjacent tables, within potentially embarrassing earshot. "I wonder if you'd like to see my room? I don't know what yours is like, but I think mine is exceptionally nice, and you might find it worth remembering if you ever come here again."

Wakerose's brows repeated their eloquent elevation, but after a pointedly puzzled pause he said: "Certainly, that sounds interesting."

They went in through the foyer and past the stairs. Simon's room was on the ground floor, in a wing beyond the inner lounge. He unlocked the door, ushered Wakerose in, and shut the door again behind them.

Wakerose looked methodically around, put his head in the bathroom, and said: "Very nice indeed. But you had something more than comparative accommodations to talk about, didn't you?"

The Saint opened his suitcase, rummaged in it and took out a pack of cigarettes, and dropped the lid again. He opened the package and then put it down nervously without taking a cigarette.

"I haven't seen you smoking before," Wakerose said.

"I'm trying to quit," Simon explained, and went on suddenly: "I won't waste your time beating about the bush. I want to marry your stephaughter."

Wakerose rocked back on his heels, and anything he had previously done with his eyebrows became a mere quiver compared with the way they now arched up into his hair line.

"Indeed? And what does Ro-

wena think about it?"

"I haven't asked her yet. It may be an old fashioned formality, but I felt I should tell you first. I thought that a gentleman of the old school like yourself would appreciate that."

"I do. Oh, I do, most emphatically. But you can't seriously imagine that I would be so overwhelmed that I should give my permission, let alone my blessing, to a suitor such as yourself?"

"If Rowena isn't twenty-one yet, she can't be far from it. So she'll be able to make up her own mind soon enough. I just wanted to be honest about my intentions; and I hoped you'd respect them, and that we could be friends."

Wakerose widened his eyes again elaborately.

"Honest? Respect?" he echoed. "After you gave your word of honor —"

"Not to steal her jewels," Simon said. "Her heart isn't a diamond — I hope. We've only spent one day together, but I think she feels a little the same about me as I do about her."

"I could scarcely help noticing the feeling," Wakerose said. "But I beg to doubt if its nature is the same. Rowena is a sweet girl, but you can't seriously expect me to believe that she is attractive in *that* way to such a man as yourself."

"When I take her to a good specialist, and she loses about fifty pounds," Simon said steadily, "I think she'll be one of the most beautiful young women that anyone ever saw."

Wakerose laughed hollowly.

"My poor fellow. Now I begin to comprehend your delusion. Obviously she hasn't told you what's the matter with her."

"About that 'adipochria'?" Simon said steadily. "Yes, she has. And I'm prepared to bet my matrimonial future that there's no such disease known to medical science, and that the doctor who diagnosed it is nothing but an unscrupulous quack."

The other's eyes narrowed.

"That is an extremely dangerous statement, Mr. Templar."

"It'll be easily proved or disproved when she gets an independent opinion from a first-class reputable clinic," said the Saint calmly. "And if I'm right, I shall then go on to theorize that it was you who snuck something into her food or her vitamin pills when she tried going on a diet, to produce the symptoms which gave you an excuse to lug her off to the first bogus specialist, whom you'd already suborned to prescribe still more carbohydrates and some pills which are probably tranquillizers or something to slow down her metabolism even more. That you deliberately plotted to make her as unattractive as possible, so as to keep her unmarried and leave her mother's fortune in your

hands until you could siphon off all that you wanted."

He had confirmation enough to satisfy himself in the long silence that followed, before there was any verbal answer.

Saville Wakerose took one more light pull at his cigar, grimaced slightly, and carefully extinguished it in an ashtray.

"One should never try to smoke the last two-and-a-half inches. Very well," he said briskly, "how much do you want?"

"For conniving to destroy a human being even more cruelly than if you poisoned her?"

"Come now, my dear fellow, let us not overdo the knightly act. There is no admiring audience. And blackmail is not such a pretty crime, either — that is the technical name for your purpose, isn't it?"

"Then you admit to something you'd rather I kept quiet about?"

"I admit nothing. I am merely looking for a civilized alternative to a great deal of crude unpleasantness and publicity. Shall we say a quarter of a million Swiss francs?"

"Don't you think it's degrading to start the bidding as low as that?"

"Half a million, then. Paid into any account you came to name, and quite untraceable."

The Saint shook his head.

"For such a brilliant man, you can be very dense, Saville. All I want is to give Rowena a fair chance for a happy normal life in spite of her money."

"Don't bid your hand too high," Wakerose said with brittle restraint. "You are assuming that Rowena will immediately believe these fantastic accusations, regardless of who is making them and what obvious motives can be imputed to him. If it should come to what they call on television a showdown between us, although I would go to great lengths to avoid anything so unsavory, I hope she would prefer to believe my version of this *tete-a-tete*."

Simon Templar smiled benignly.

He turned back to his suitcase, opened it again, pushed a soiled shirt aside, and extracted a plastic box no bigger than a book. A small metal object dangled from it at the end of a flexible wire, which now seemed to have been hanging outside the suitcase when the lid was closed.

"Have you seen these portable tape recorders?" he asked chattily. "Completely transistorized, battery operated, and frightfully efficient. Of course, their capacity is limited, so I had to use that cigarette routine for an excuse to switch it on when we came in. And the sound quality isn't hi-fi by musicians' standards, but voices are unmistakably recognizable. I wonder what version you can give Rowena that'll cancel out this one?"

"How delightfully droll!" All of Wakerose's face seemed to have gradually turned as gray as his hair, but it can be stated that he did not flinch. "I should not have been so caustic at the expense of television, but I thought that was the only place where these things actually happened. So what is your price now?"

Simon was neatly coiling the flexible link to the microphone, preparatory to tucking it away in the interior of his gadget, but still leaving it operational for the last syllables that it could absorb.

"This will be hard for you to digest, Saville," he said, "but since anything you paid me would probably be money that you ought to be giving back to Rowena, my conscience would bother me, even if she has got plenty to spare. On the other hand, I'd like to get her out of your clutches without any messy headlines. So I'll give you a break. If you back me up tomorrow evening when I suggest that she ought to see another doctor — whom I'll suggest — and if you can think up a good excuse to resign voluntarily as her guardian and trustee, I won't play this tape to her."

Wakerose compressed his lips and stared grimly about the room. With his hands locked tensely behind his back, he paced across it to the open window and stood looking out into the night. The hunch of his shoulders gave the impression that if it had been on a higher floor he might have thrown himself out.

After a full minute, he turned.

"I shall think about it," he said, and walked towards the door.

"Think very hard," said the Saint. "Because I'm not quite sure that it mightn't be better for Rowena to know the whole horrible truth about you and your slimy scheme. And whatever brilliant inspirations you have about how to doublecross me and retrieve the situation, I'll always have this little recording."

Wakerose sneered silently at him, and went out without another word.

He came back soon after three o'clock in the morning, through the open window, and crossed in slow-motion tiptoe to the bed where the covers humped over a peacefully insensible occupant. There was enough starlight to define clearly the dark headshape buried in the pillow but half uncovered by the sheet, and he swung mightly at it with the heavy candlestick which he carrieid in one gloved hand . . .

The massive base bit solidly and accurately into its target, but with no solid crunch of bone, only a soggy resistance — which was natural, since the "head" consisted of a crumpled

towel balled up inside a dark pullover and artistically molded and arranged to give the right appearance. At the same time, a blinding luminance dispelled the treacherous dimness for a fraction of a second before the Saint switched on a less painfully dazzling light.

He stood in the bathroom doorway, holding a Polaroid camera with flash attachment in one hand.

"I was beginning to be afraid you were never coming, Saville," he murmured genially. "But I kept telling myself that you were clever enough to realize that you ought to get rid of me and my tape record, no matter what, if you ever wanted to sleep well again. Or I hoped you would; because a picture like this would clinch any ambiguities in the sound track, which you might have been just slippery enough to think you could explain away."

Wakerose stood frozen in a kind of catalepsy, while Simon deftly changed the bulb in his flash and snapped one more after-the-crime souvenir, admittedly not an action shot, but just for luck.

"Of course, this washes out the previous deal," he said. "I don't want to spoil Rowena's day tomorrow, so I'm not going to play the tape to her till we come home. By that time I hope your air-conditioned juggernaut will have been repaired so that you can have taken off, leaving behind a signed confession which I think I can persuade her not to use as long as your accounts are in order and you never bother her again. Otherwise, chum, you many find yourself trying to sell Gourmet some novel articles on prison cuisine."

"Yes," said Rowena Flane. "Yes, now I understand – everything except why you've done so much and wouldn't take anything when you could have."

"Because," Simon said, "one day I'll get so much more out of it when I see you as slim and lovely as you should be, and I can think that I made it happen."

"Like in a fairy tale. So the prince kissed the toad, and broke the spell, and it turned into a beautiful princess. Oh, it's hard to believe it's coming true." But she was sad. "Only by then you won't be threatening to marry me any more."

"Why don't we wait a couple of years," said the Saint gently, "and see whether you're still single too?"

the dance

by F. Scott Fitzgerald

ALL MY LIFE I have had a rather curious horror of small towns: not suburbs; they are quite a different matter -- but the little lost cities of New Hampshire and Georgia and Kansas, and upper New York. I was born in New York City, and even as a little girl I never had any fear of the streets or the strange foreign faces – but on the occasions when I've been in the sort of place I'm referring to, I've been oppressed with the consciousness that there was a whole hidden life, a whole series of secret implications, significances and terrors, just below the surface, of which I knew nothing. In the cities everything good or bad eventually comes out, comes out of people's hearts, I mean. Life moves about, moves on, vanishes. In the small towns – those of between five and twenty-five thousand people – old hatreds, old and unforgotten affairs, ghostly scandals and tragedies, seem unable to die, but live on all tangled up with the natural ebb and flow of outward life.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald, who died in 1940, was to become—in his lifetime—the living symbol of what their contemporaries considered to be "the angry young" writers of that generation. He "captured the spirit of the twenties" in novels such as THE GREAT GATSBY (1925) and the earlier THE BEAUTIFUL AND DAMNED (1922). And in the present story he captured something of the spirit of the South of a generation ago—the same South that Faulkner was writing about in New Orleans. . . . *H.S.S.*

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Nowhere has this sensation come over me more insistently than in the South. Once out of Atlanta and Birmingham and New Orleans, I often have the feeling that I can no longer communicate with the people around me. The men and the girls speak a language wherein courtesy is combined with violence, fanatic morality with corn drinking recklessness, in a fashion which I can't understand. In "Huckleberry Finn" Mark Twain described some of those towns perched along the Mississippi River, with their fierce feuds and their equally fierce revivals — and some of them haven't fundamentally changed beneath their new surface of flivvers and radios. They are deeply uncivilized to this day.

I speak of the South because it was in a small Southern city of this type that I once saw the surface crack for a minute and something savage, uncanny and frightening rear its head. Then the surface closed again — and when I had gone back there since, I've been surprised to find myself as charmed as ever by the magnolia trees and the singing darkies in the street and the sensuous warm nights. I have been charmed, too, by the bountiful hospitality and the languorous easy-going outdoor life and the almost universal good manners. But all too frequently I am the prey of a vivid nightmare that recalls what I experienced in that town five years ago.

Davis — that is not its real name — has a population of about twenty thousand people, one-third of them colored. It is a cotton-mill town, and the workers of that trade, several thousand gaunt and ignorant "poor whites," live together in an ill-reputed section known as "Cotton Hollow." The population of Davis has varied in its seventy-five years. Once it was under consideration for the capital of the State, and so the older families and their kin form a proud little aristocracy, even when individually they have sunk to destitution.

That winter I'd made the usual round in New York until about April, when I decided I never wanted to see another invitation again. I was tired and I wanted to go to Europe for a rest; but the baby panic of 1921 hit father's business, and so it was suggested that I go South and visit Aunt Musidora Hale instead.

Vaguely I imagined that I was going to the country, but on the day I arrived the Davis *Courier* published a hilarious old picture of me on its society page, and I found I was in for another season. On a small scale, of course: there were Saturday night dances at the little country club with its nine-hole golf

course, and some informal dinner parties and several attractive and attentive boys. I didn't have a dull time at all, and when after three weeks I wanted to go home, it wasn't because I was bored. On the contrary I wanted to go home because I'd allowed myself to get rather interested in a good-looking young man named Charley Kincaid, without realizing that he was engaged to another girl.

"We'd been drawn together from the first because he was almost the only boy in town who'd gone North to college and I was still young enough to think that America revolved around Harvard and Princeton and Yale. He liked me too—I could see that; but when I heard that his engagement to a girl named Marie Bannerman had been announced six months before, there was nothing for me except to go away. The town was too small to avoid people, and though so far there hadn't been any talk, I was sure that—well, that if we kept meeting, the emotion we were beginning to feel would somehow get into words. I'm not mean enough to take a man away from another girl.

Marie Bannerman was almost a beauty. Perhaps she would have been a beauty if she'd had any clothes, and if she hadn't used bright pink rouge in two high spots on her cheeks and powdered her nose and chin to a funeral white. Her hair was shining black; her features were lovely; and an affection of one eye kept it always half-closed and gave an air of humorous mischief to her face.

I was leaving on a Monday, and on Saturday night a crowd of us dined at the country club as usual before the dance. There was Joe Cable, the son of a former governor, a handsome dissipated and yet somehow charming young man; Catherine Jones, a pretty, sharp-eyed girl with an exquisite figure, who under her rouge might have been any age from eighteen to twenty-five; Marie Bannerman; Charley Kincaid; myself and two or three others.

I loved to listen to the genial flow of bizarre neighborhood anecdote at this kind of party. For instance, one of the girls, together with her entire family, had that afternoon been evicted from her house for non-payment of rent. She told the story wholly without self-consciousness, merely as something troublesome but amusing. And I loved the banter which presumed every girl to be infinitely beautiful and attractive, and every man to have been secretly and hopelessly in love with every girl present from their respective cradles.

"We liked to die laughin'" . . . "—said he was fixin' to shoot him without he stayed away." The

girls "'clared to heaven"; the men "took oath" on inconsequential statements. "How come you nearly about forgot to come by for me—" and the incessant Honey, Honey, Honey, Honey, until the word seemed to roll like a genial liquid from heart to heart.

Outside, the May night was hot, a still night, velvet, soft-pawed, splattered thick with stars. It drifted heavy and sweet into the large room where we sat and where we would later dance, with no sound in it except the occasional long crunch of an arriving car on the drive. Just at that moment I hated to leave Davis as I never had hated to leave a town before—I felt that I wanted to spend my life in this town, drifting and dancing forever through these long, hot, romantic nights.

Yet horror was already hanging over that little party, was waiting tensely among us, an invited guest, and telling off the hours until it could show its pale and blinding face. Beneath the chatter and laughter something was going on, something secret and obscure that I didn't know.

Presently the colored orchestra arrived, followed by the first trickle of the dance crowd. An enormous red-faced man in muddy boots and with a revolver strapped around his waist, clumped in and paused for a moment at our table before going upstairs to the locker room. It was Bill Abercrombie, the sheriff, the son of Congressman Abercrombie. Some of the boys asked him half-whispered questions, and he replied in an attempt at an undertone.

"Yes. . . . He's in the swamp all right; farmer saw him near the crossroads store. . . . Like to have a shot at him myself."

I asked the boy next to me what was the matter.

"Assault case," he said, over in Kisco, about two miles from here. He's hiding in the swamp, and they're going in after him tomorrow."

"What'll they do to him?"

"Hang him, I guess?"

The notion of the forlorn man crouching dismally in a desolate bog waiting for dawn and death depressed me for a moment. Then the feeling passed and was forgotten.

After dinner Charley Kincaid and I walked out on the veranda—he had just heard that I was going away. I kept as close to the others as I could, answering his words but not his eyes—something inside me was protesting against leaving him on such a casual note. The temptation was strong to let something flicker up between us here at the end. I wanted him to kiss me, just once, it would accept with equanimity the idea of never seeing him any more; but my

mind knew it wasn't so.

The other girls began to drift inside and upstairs to the dressing-room to improve their complexions, and with Charley still beside me, I followed. Just at that moment I wanted to cry—perhaps my eyes were already blurred, or perhaps it was my haste lest they should be, but I opened the door of a small card-room by mistake and with my error the tragic machinery of the night began to function. In the card-room, not five feet from us, stood Marie Bannerman, Charley's fiancee, and Joe Cable. They were in each other's arms, absorbed in a passionate and oblivious kiss.

I closed the door quickly, and without glancing at Charley opened the right door and ran upstairs.

A few minutes later Marie Bannerman entered the crowded dressing room. She saw me and came over, smiling in a sort of mock despair, but she breathed quickly, and the smile trembled a little on her mouth.

"You won't say a word, honey, will you?" she whispered.

"Of course not." I wondered how that could matter, now that Charley Kincaid knew.

"Who else was it that saw us?"

"Only Charley Kincaid and I."

"Oh!" She looked a little puzzled, then she added: "He didn't wait to say anything, honey. When we came out, he was just going out the door. I thought he was going to wait and romp all over Joe."

"How about his romping all over you?" I couldn't help asking.

"Oh, he'll do that." She laughed wryly. "But, honey, I know how to handle him. It's just when he's first mad that I'm scared of him—he's got an awful temper." She whistled reminiscently. "I know, because this happened once before."

I wanted to slap her. Turning my back, I walked away on the pretext of borrowing a pin from Katie, the negro maid. Catherine Jones was claiming the latter's attention with a short gingham garment which needed repair.

"What's that? I asked.

"Dancing dress," she answered shortly, her mouth full of pins, When she took them out, she added: "It's all come to pieces—I've used it so much."

"Are you going to dance here tonight?"

"Going to try."

Somebody had told me that she wanted to be a dancer—that she had taken lessons in New York.

"Can I help you fix anything?"

"No, thanks—unless—can you sew? Katie gets so excited Saturday that she's no good for anything except fetching pins.

I'd be everlasting grateful to you, honey."

I had reasons for not wanting to go downstairs just yet, and so I sat down and worked on her dress for half an hour. I wondered if Charley had gone home, if I would ever see him again—I scarcely dared to wonder if what he had seen would set him free, ethically. When I went down finally he was not in sight.

The room was not crowded; the tables had been removed and dancing was general. At that time, just after the war, all Southern boys had a way of agitating their heels from side to side, pivoting on the ball of the foot as they danced, and to acquiring this accomplishment I had devoted many hours. There were plenty of stags, almost all of them cheerful with corn-liquor; I refused on an average at least two drinks a dance. Even when it is mixed with a soft drink, as is the custom, rather than gulped from the neck of a warm bottle, it is a formidable proposition. Only a few girls like Catherine Jones took an occasional sip from some boy's flask down at the dark end of the veranda.

I liked Catherine Jones—she seemed to have more energy than these other girls, though Aunt Musidora sniffed rather contemptuously whenever Catherine stopped for me in her car to go to the movies, remarking that she guessed "the bottom rail had gotten to be the top rail now." Her family were "new and common," but it seemed to me that perhaps her very commonness was an asset. Almost every girl in Davis confided in me at one time or another that her ambition was to "get away and come to New York," but only Catherine Jones had actually taken the step of studying stage dancing with that end in view.

She was often asked to dance at these Saturday night affairs, something "classic" or perhaps an acrobatic clog—on one memorable occasion she had annoyed the governing b o a r d by a "shimee" (then the scapegrace of jazz), and the novel and somewhat startling excuse made for her was that she was "so tight she didn't know what she was doing, anyhow. She impressed me as a curious personality, and I was eager to see what she would produce tonight.

At twelve o'clock the music always ceased, as dancing was forbidden on Sunday morning. So at eleven-thirty a vast fanfaronade of drum and cornet beckoned the dancers and the couples on the verandas, and the ones in the cars outside, and the stragglers from the bar, into the ballroom. Chairs were brought in and galloped up *en masse* and with a great racket to the slight-

ly raised platform. The orchestra had evacuated this and taken a place beside. Then, as the rearward lights were lowered, they began to play a tune accompanied by a curious drum-beat that I had never heard before, and simultaneously Catherine Jones appeared upon the platform. She wore the short, country girl's dress upon which I had lately labored, and a wide sunbonnet under which her face, stained yellow with powder, looked out at us with rolling eyes and a vacant leer. She began to dance.

I had never seen anything like it before, and until five years later, I wasn't to see it again. It was the Charleston—it must have been the Charleston. I remember the double drum-beat like a shouted *"Hey! Hey!"* and the unfamiliar swing of the arms and the odd knock-kneed effect. She had picked it up, heaven knows where.

Her audience, familiar with negro rhythms, leaned forward eagerly—even to them it was something new, but it is stamped on my mind as clearly and indelibly as though I had seen it yesterday. The figure on the platform swinging and stamping, the excited orchestra, the waiters grinning in the doorway of the bar, and all around, through many windows, the soft languorous Southern night seeping in from swamp and cotton-field and lush foliage and brown, warm streams. At what point a feeling of tense uneasiness began to steal over me I don't know. The dance could scarcely have taken ten minutes; perhaps the first beats of the barbaric music disquieted me—long before it was over, I was sitting rigid in my seat, and my eyes were wandering here and there around the hall, passing along the rows of shadowy faces as if seeking some security that was no longer there.

I'm not a nervous type; nor am I given to panic; but for a moment I was afraid that if the music and the dance didn't stop, I'd be hysterical. Something was happening all about me. I knew it as well as if I could see into these unknown souls. Things were happening, but one thing especially was leaning over so close that it almost touched us, that it did touch us. . . . I almost screamed as a hand brushed accidentally against my back.

The music stopped. There was applause and protracted cries of encore, but Catherine Jones shook her head definitely at the orchestra leader and made as though to leave the platform. The appeals for more continued — again she shook her head, and it seemed to me that her expression was rather angry. Then a strange incident occurred. At the

protracted pleading of some one in the front row, the orchestra leader began the vamp of the tune, as if to lure Catherine Jones into changing her mind. Instead she turned toward him, snapped out, "Didn't you hear me say no?" and then, surprisingly, slapped his face. The music stopped and an amused murmur terminated abruptly as a muffled but clearly audible shot rang out.

Immediately we were on our feet, for the sound indicated that it had been fired within or near the house. One of the chaperons gave a little scream, but when some wag called out, "Caesar's in that henhouse again," the momentary alarm dissolved into laughter. The club manager, followed by several curious couples, went out to have a look about, but the rest were already moving around the floor to the strains of "Good Night, Ladies," which traditionally ended the dance.

I was glad it was over. The man with whom I had come went to get his car, and calling a waiter, I sent him for my golf clubs, which were in the stack upstairs. I strolled out on the porch and waited, wondering again if Charley Kincaid had gone home.

Suddenly I was aware, in that curious way in which you become aware of something that has been going on for several minutes, that there was a tumult inside. Women were shrieking; there was a cry of "Oh, my God!" then the sounds of a stampede on the inside stairs, and footsteps running back and forth across the ballroom. A girl appeared from somewhere and pitched forward in a dead faint — almost immediately another girl did the same, and I heard a frantic male voice shouting into a telephone. Then, hatless and pale, a young man rushed out on the porch, and with hands that were cold as ice, seized my arm.

"What is it?" I cried. "A fire? What happened?"

"Marie Bannerman's dead upstairs in the women's dressing room. Shot through the throat!"

The rest of that night is a series of visions that seem to have no connection with one another, that follow each other with the sharp instantaneous transitions of scenes in the movies. There was a group who stood arguing on the porch, in voices now raised, now hushed, about what should be done and how every waiter in the club, "even old Moses," ought to be given the third degree tonight. That a "nigger" had shot and killed Marie Bannerman was the instant and unquestioned assumption—in the first unreasoning instant, anyone who doubted it would have been under sus-

picion. The guilty one was said to be Katie Golstien, the colored maid, who had discovered the body and fainted. It was said to be "that nigger they were looking for over near Kisco." It was any man at all.

Within half an hour people began to drift out, each with his little contribution of new discoveries. The crime had been committed with Sheriff Abercrombie's gun—he had hung it, belt and all, in full view on the wall before coming down to dance. It was missing—they were hunting for it now. Instantly killed, the doctor said—bullet had been fired from only a few feet away.

Then a few minutes later another young man came out and made the announcement in a loud, grave voice:

"They've arrested Charley Kincaid."

My head reeled. Upon the group gathered on the veranda fell an awed, stricken silence.

"Arrested Charley Kincaid!"

"Charley *Kincaid!*"

Why, he was one of the best, one of themselves.

"That's the craziest thing I ever heard of!"

The young man nodded, shocked like the rest, but self-important with his information.

"He wasn't downstairs, when Catherine Jones was dancing—he says he was in the men's locker-room. And Marie Bannerman told a lot of girls that they'd had a row, and she was scared of what he'd do."

Again an awed silence.

"That's the craziest thing I ever heard!" some one said again.

"Charley *Kincaid!*"

The narrator waited a moment. Then he added:

"He caught her kissing Joe Cable —"

I couldn't keep silence a minute longer.

"What about it? I cried out. "I was with him at the time. He wasn't — he wasn't angry at all."

They looked at me, their faces startled, confused, unhappy. Suddenly the footsteps of several men sounded loud through the ballroom, and a moment later Charley Kincaid, his face dead white, came out the front door between the Sheriff and another man. Crossing the porch quickly, they descended the steps and disappeared in the darkness. A moment later there was the sound of a starting car.

When an instant later far away down the road I heard the eerie scream of an ambulance, I got up desperately and called to my escort, who formed part of the whispering group.

"I've got to go," I said. "I can't stand this. Either take me home or I'll find a place in another car." Reluctantly he shouldered my clubs — the sight of them made me realize that I now

couldn't leave on Monday after all – and followed me down the steps just as the black body of the ambulance curved in at the gate–a ghastly shadow on the bright, starry night.

The situation, after the first wild surmises, the first burst of unreasoning loyalty to Charley Kincaid, had died away, was outlined by the Davis *Courier* and by most of the State newspapers in this fashion: Marie Bannerman died in the women's dressing room of the Davis Country Club from the effects of a shot fired at close quarters from a revolver just after eleven forty-five o'clock on Saturday night. Many persons had heard the shot; moreover it had undoubtedly been fired from the revolver of Sheriff Abercrombie, which had been hanging in full sight on the wall of the next room. Abercrombie himself was down in the ballroom when the murder took place, as many witnesses could testify. The revolver was not found.

So far as was known, the only man who had been upstairs at the time the shot was fired was Charles Kincaid. He was engaged to Miss Bannerman, but according to several witnesses they had quarreled seriously that evening. Miss Bannerman herself had mentioned the quarrel, adding that she was afraid and wanted to keep away from him until he cooled off.

Charles Kincaid asserted at the time the shot was fired he was in the men's locker room – where, indeed, he was found, immediately after the discovery of Miss Bannerman's body. He denied having had any words with Miss Bannerman at all. He had heard the shot but it had had no significance for him – if he thought anything of it, he thought that "some one was potting cats outdoors."

Why had he chosen to remain in the locker room during the dance?

No reason at all. He was tired. He was waiting until Miss Bannermann wanted to go home.

The body was discovered by Katie Golstien, the colored maid, who herself was found in a faint when the crowd of girls surged upstairs for their coats. Returning from the kitchen, where she had been getting a bite to eat, Katie had found Miss Bannerman, her dress wet with blood, already dead on the floor.

Both the police and the newspapers attached importance to the geography of the country club's second story. It consisted of a row of three rooms – the women's dressing room and the men's locker room at either end, and in the middle a room which was used as a cloak-room and for the storage of golf clubs. The women's and men's rooms had no outlet except into this cham-

ber, which was connected by one stairs with the ballroom below, and by another with the kitchen. According to the testimony of three negro cooks and the white caddy master, no one but Katie Golstien had gone up the kitchen stairs that night.

As I remember it after five years, the foregoing is a pretty accurate summary of the situation when Charley Kincaid was accused of first-degree murder and committed for trial. Other people, chiefly negroes, were suspected (at the loyal instigation of Charley Kincaid's friends), and several arrests were made, but nothing ever came of them, and upon what grounds they were based I have long forgotten. One group, in spite of the disappearance of the pistol, claimed persistently that it was a suicide and suggested some ingenious reasons to account for the absence of the weapon.

Now when it is known Marie Bannerman happened to die so savagely and so violently, it would be easy for me, of all people, to say that I believed in Charley Kincaid all the time. But I didn't. I thought that he had killed her, and at the same time I knew that I loved him with all my heart. That it was I who first happened upon the evidence which set him free was due not to any faith in his innocence but to a strange vividness with which, in moods of excitement, certain scenes stamp themselves on my memory, so that I can remember every detail and how that detail struck me at the time.

It was one afternoon early in July, when the case against Charley Kincaid seemed to be at its strongest, that the horror of the actual murder slipped away from me for a moment and I began to think about other incidents of that same haunted night. Something Marie Bannerman had said to me in the dressing room persistently eluded me, bothered me – not because I believed it to be important, but simply because I couldn't remember. It was gone from me, as if it had been a part of the fantastic undercurrents of small-town life which I had felt so strongly that evening, the sense that things were in the air, old secrets, old loves and feuds, and unresolved situations, that I, an outsider, could never fully understand. Just for a minute it seemed to me that Marie Bannerman had pushed aside the curtain; then it had dropped into place again – the house into which I might have looked was dark now forever.

Another incident, perhaps less important, also haunted me. The tragic events of a few minutes after had driven it from every-

one's mind, but I had a strong impression that for a brief space of time I wasn't the only one to be surprised. When the audience had demanded an encore from Catherine Jones, her unwillingness to dance again had been so acute that she had been driven to the point of slapping the orchestra leader's face. The discrepancy between his offense and the venom of the rebuff recurred to be again and again. It wasn't natural — or, more important, it hadn't *seemed* natural. In view of the fact that Catherine Jones had been drinking, it was explicable, but it worried me now as it had worried me then. Rather to lay its ghost than to do any investigating, I pressed an obliging young man into service and called on the leader of the band.

His name was Thomas, a very dark, very simple-hearted virtuoso of the traps, and it took less than ten minutes to find out that Catherine Jones' gesture had surprised him as much as it had me. He had known her a long time, seen her at dances since she was a little girl — why, the very dance she did that night was one she had rehearsed with his orchestra a week before. And a few days later she had come to him and said she was sorry.

"I knew she would," he concluded. "She's a right good-hearted girl. My sister Katie was her nurse from when she was born up to the time she went to school."

"Your sister?"

"Katie. She's the maid out at the country-club. Katie Golstien. You been reading 'bout her in the papers in 'at Charley Kincaid case. She's the maid. Katie Golstien. She's the maid at the country-club what found the body of Miss Bannerman."

"So Katie was Miss Catherine Jones' nurse?"

"Yes ma'am."

Going home, stimulated, but unsatisfied, I asked my companion a quick question.

"Were Catherine and Marie good friends?"

"Oh, yes," he answered without hesitation. "All the girls are good friends here, except when two of them are tryin' to get hold of the same man. Then they warm each other up a little."

"Why do you suppose Catherine hasn't married? Hasn't she got lots of beaux?"

"Off and on. She only likes people for a day or so at a time. That is — all except Joe Cable."

Now a scene burst upon me, broke over me like a dissolving wave. And suddenly, my mind shivering from the impact, I remembered what Marie Bannerman had said to me in the dressing room: "Who else was it that saw?" She had caught a glimpse of someone else, a figure passing

so quickly that she could not identify it, out of the corner of her eye.

And suddenly, simultaneously, I seemed to see that figure, as if I too had been vaguely conscious of it at the time, just as one is aware of a familiar gait or outline on the street long before there is any flicker of recognition. On the corner of my own eye was stamped a hurrying figure — that might have been Catherine Jones.

But when the shot was fired, Catherine Jones was in full view of over fifty people. Was it credible that Katie Golstien, a woman of fifty, who as a nurse had been known and trusted by three generations of Davis people, would shoot down a young girl in cold blood at Catherine Jones' command?

"But when the shot was fired, Catherine Jones was in full view of over fifty people."

That sentence beat in my head all night, taking on fantastic variations, dividing itself into phrases, segments, individual words.

"But when the shot was fired — Catherine Jones was in full view — of over fifty people."

When the shot was fired! What shot? The shot we heard. When the shot was fired. . . . When the shot was fired. . . .

The next morning at nine o'clock, with the pallor of sleeplessness buried under a quantity of paint such as I had never worn before or have since, I walked up a rickety flight of stairs to the Sheriff's office.

Abercrombie, engrossed in his morning's mail, looked up curiously as I came in the door.

"Catherine Jones did it," I cried, struggling to keep the hysteria out of my voice. "She killed Marie Bannerman with a shot we didn't hear because the orchestra was playing and everybody was pushing up the chairs. The shot we heard was when Katie fired the pistol out the window after the music was stopped. To give Catherine an alibi!"

I was right — as everyone now knows, but for a week, until Katie Golstien broke down under a fierce and ruthless inquisition, nobody believed me. Even Charley Kincaid, as he afterward confessed, didn't dare to think it could be true.

What had been the relations between Catherine and Joe Cable no one ever knew, but evidently she had determined that this clandestine affair with Marie Bannerman had gone too far.

Then Marie chanced to come into the women's room while Catherine was dressing for her dance — and there again there is a certain obscurity, for Catherine always claimed that Marie got the revolver, threatened her

with it and that in the ensuing struggle the trigger was pulled. In spite of everything I always rather liked Catherine Jones, but in justice it must be said that only a simple minded and very exceptional jury would have let her off with five years. And in just about five years from her commitment my husband and I are going to make a round of the New York musical shows and look hard at all the members of the chorus from the very front row.

After the shooting she must have thought quickly. Katie was told to wait until the music stopped, fire the revolver out the window and then hide it — Catherine Jones neglected to specify where. Katie, on the verge of collapse, obeyed instructions, but she was never able to specify where she had hid the revolver. And no one ever knew until a year later, when Charley and I were on our honeymoon and Sheriff Abercrombie's u g l y weapon dropped out of my golf-bag onto a Hot Springs golf links. The bag must have been standing just outside the dressing-room door; Katie's trembling hand had dropped the revolver into the first aperture she could see.

We live in New York. Small towns make us both uncomfortable. Every day we read about the crime-waves in the big cities, but at least a wave is something tangible that you can provide against. What I dread above all things is the unknown depths, the incalulable ebb and flow, the secret shapes of things that drift through opaque darkness under the surface of the sea.

NEXT MONTH—

RETRIBUTION OVERTAKES ONE OF THOSE SOMEWHAT LESS THAN ENDEARING MEN WHOSE MISSION IN LIFE IT IS — OR WAS — TO SELL YOU WHAT YOU DO NOT NEED . . .

in

THE MIRACLE TEA PARTY

A SHORT SAINT NOVEL by LESLIE CHARTERIS

—in the August 1963 issue of THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

flashlight on death

by Lawrence G. Blochman

THREE SIGNS indicated to Calcutta the approach of that season called, for relative reasons only, "the cold weather." First, the thermometer dipped slightly below seventy at night; second, the green flies appeared in annoying clouds; and third, the visit of the viceroy was announced.

Ever since the capital of India was removed to Delhi, the viceroy makes annual cold weather pilgrimages to Calcutta, to assure Calcuttans that their city is still the first in India and the second in the empire. He also engages in such important public functions as congratulating the winner of the Tollygunge Open Golf Tourney. It was an assignment to photograph his Excellency on the golf course which headed Harry Cort, American cameraman stranded in India, into the most anxious thirty-six hours of his adventurous career.

Soon after the crack of dawn — ceremonies in India begin before seven in the morning to cheat the sun — the streets leading to the golf club were clear-

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Lawrence G. Blochman is so much a part of the history of the genre that it is difficult to find words to describe this onetime newspaperman and officer of the Overseas Press Club who has lived and worked in most countries that you can think of—and knows them the way few Americans ever do . . . Mr. Blochman, a former National President of the Mystery Writers of America, lives in N. Y.

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ed. Viceregal bodyguards lined the route, a gorgeous spectacle in their red coats and blue and gold pugarees, red and white pennants flying from the tips of their lances, and the yellow morning light gleaming on their high boots. They were fine, husky Indians from the northern states, and much more gorgeous to look upon than the viceroy himself, who, after all, was just another Britisher in striped trousers, frock coat and white topee. However, the usual crowds formed, and people hung out of windows waiting to see the viceroy pass.

After an expectant delay, the sound of a motor was heard, and necks craned curiously. Then spectators were rewarded, not by a glimpse of the king-emperor's personal representative, but by the spectacle of Harry Cort, undersized, wiry limbed American press photographer, passing noisily between the surprised and resplendent lines of the vice-regal guards, reclining regally in the back seat of a rattling flivver grown old in the editorial service of the Calcutta *Diplomat*. The angle at which his topee was pushed back from his forehead, disclosing a disorderly lock of jute-coloured hair, gave his slightly freckled face an air of humorous impertinence. A reckless gleam in his grey eyes and the firm pressure of determined lips upon a handmade cigarette contradicted any complete impression of levity, however.

In the front seat of the same rickety vehicle, beside the brown, bare-foot syce, sat Jaganath Mullick, the Bengali *babu* who served Cort as understudy and assistant. The double chinned Mullick sat proudly with his stubby fingers clasped on his rotund stomach, his shaven head bare. Stacked about his feet and entangled in the folds of his white *dhoti* were a black cotton umbrella which served as a sunshade; tripods; extra plate holders; a flashlight gun for emergency exposures; and various other photographic sundries. Mullick could usually be depended upon to forget something essential, just as he could be depended upon not to forget his own camera — a cheap, box Brownie affair which he always apologetically insisted belonged to his young son. However, as the son was not quite a year old, Cort rightly surmised that Mullick was merely aping his boss in the business of learning to be a press photographer.

The arrival of the press flivver at the Tollygunge Golf Club was not nearly so auspicious as the ride through the guards. As the car rattled by a veranda full of officials, Captain Reginald Beeker stepped indignantly on the running board. Captain Beeker, military secretary to the

governor of Bengal, was fussy and furious. Many times before he had been irritated by Harry Cort's lack of awe before the splendour of the British *raj* as exemplified by the trappings surrounding Bengal Government House. And now with the viceroy on his annual visit to the presidency, Captain Beeker felt personally responsible for perfect performance of everything in Bengal, down to the prompt rising and setting of the sun. The behaviour of the American photographer was nothing short of public scandal.

"You can't do this sort of thing!" declared Captain Beeker, seizing Cort's arm as the American was preparing to get out of the car.

"Sure I can," replied Cort breezily.

"Not again," snapped Captain Beeker, motioning to three subalterns to help push Cort back into the flivver. "Drive him away," he directed, as one officer took the wheel. "He's not to come back while his Excellency is here. Furthermore —" this was a parting shot at Cort— "you'll never be allowed inside Government House grounds again."

"Amen!" sang out Cort, as his military escort bore him away.

Cort usually thrived on efforts of others to thwart him. He was used to having camera-shy but news-worthy subjects block his efforts. He had carted a press Graflex all over America for nearly fifteen years and had rarely come in empty handed. He had pushed his way past "no" men to make thousands of exclusive news pictures. He had sneaked a camera into the death house to photograph an execution. He had barely escaped with his life when a press plane he had chartered fell in flames. He had been pushed off the rail of a liner into New York harbour by a European celebrity who objected to photographers. He had done funerals of presidents and weddings of princess. He had faked pictures of crimes and posed chorus girls with crossed legs.

Then he had conceived the idea of owning a picture agency of his own. With a laboratory man named Spencer, he founded the firm of Cort & Spencer, "The Camera Men who Cover the World."

To make good the slogan, Cort started around the world to build up a library of foreign negatives and arrange for correspondents in fifty countries. It looked big until Cort got to India. He had apparently lost contact with his mailing addresses, and had missed several drafts from the home office. After living on credit for a month in Calcutta, he cabled for money. The cable that came back announced that his partner Spencer, together with the Cort

& Spencer treasury, had disappeared. When he found out he was a financial orphan, with a stack of debts, he did the only thing he could decently do: He settled down in Calcutta to work until he could pay what he owed and buy his passage home.

He held a job as staff photographer for the *Diplomat* by his audacity and efficiency, and despite J. Harte Simpson, the news editor. Simpson hated most of mankind. A newspaper man who rode to work in an expensive car with a footman – Simpson was supposed to be some sort of remittance man – had no trouble at all in being imperiously disagreeable. And although the morning's rebuff on the viceroy picture was only Cort's second failure in Calcutta, it happened to be his second in two days. Cort knew Simpson would make capital of the fact, and he was not disappointed.

"No more dependable than a *babu*!" exclaimed Simpson. His thin face was pale and old beyond his apparent thirty years. He had a trick of talking without opening his mouth.

Cort did not reply at once. He set down his bulky camera, took a hitch in his white trousers, and leisurely watched a barefoot office boy with white moustache and white turban lay a sheaf of proofs on Simpson's desk.

"No damage done," said Cort at last. "You can't fill the whole paper with the viceroy, and I'll get him at the Government House party tonight.

"Oh, you will?"

"Yeah, I'll make a flashnight."

"It happens," said Simpson, smiling sarcastically as he fingered a sheet of note paper, "that I've just been notified that you'll no longer be admitted to Government House. A *chaprassi* brought an official chit to that effect not ten minutes ago."

"That don't mean anything," said Cort. "I'll get the picture anyhow."

"As you got the photo of Mr. Franklin Jones yesterday?"

Cort grinned.

"Didn't I bring you a shot of Jones?"

"A photo of a man getting out of his bath backwards!" snorted Simpson. "What do you expect me to do with a picture like that?"

"I had to take it through a window," said Cort. "This Jones guy is harder to see than the Pope. I don't see what you're so damned anxious to mug him for. He doesn't look important."

"Let me judge his importance. It happens I want his picture."

"No American detective is that important."

"Detective?" Simpson carefully placed a slug of type metal on the proof sheets which were fluttering faintly in the tepid breeze stirred up by the electric *punkah* overhead. Then he star-

ed at Cort. "Who told you he was a detective?"

"Bar-room rumours said Cort. "Just gossip."

Simpson drummed abstractedly on the desk top.

"Forget about Jones," he said. "Get the viceroy—if you can. I doubt if you'll make it."

Simpson's superior smile returned. Cort turned his back on it and sauntered downstairs to his dark-room. He wanted to coach Jaganath Mullick in the details of his plan to crash the gate at Government House.

It was after ten that night when Harry Cort put his plan into operation. Gaining entrance was easy enough. He knew most of the Government House *durwans* and had distributed enough cigarettes among them at one time or another to be able to place a rupee where it would do the most good. The trick of the evening consisted in staying out of sight of Captain Reginald Beeker, who, Cort decided, would be with the guests in the expansive gardens back of the mansion.

Cort slipped under the broad front stairs of the mansion and followed a corridor that lead to a series of offices in the rear, on the ground floor. He found the office he sought—a long, narrow room with desks for a secretary of some kind, two assistant secretaries, and several secretaries to assistant secretaries. The room was unoccupied. Across the far end was a triple window, looking out upon the lawns and shrubberies of the governor's garden.

Cort quietly pushed open the centre pane of the window, and quickly set up his camera. Everything was working out according to schedule. The window commanded the strip of red cloth laid across the lawn, and on which the governor and the viceroy, with their wives and staffs, would make a formal entrance. All Cort had to do was focus, open his shutter, and wait. He had sent Jaganath Mullick into the grounds by another entrance, to crawl through the shrubbery with a flashlight gun. When the viceroy arrived, Mullick would set off the flash, thus illuminating the scene and exposing the plate in Cort's waiting camera. Since the location of the flash would give no clue to Cort's whereabouts, his escape with the picture would be simplified.

From his vantage point Cort watched the long tunics and big turbans of servants circulating among the crowds on the lawn, bearing trays of glasses and bottles. He heard music somewhere. He made out familiar faces among the men in bob-tailed white coats and black trousers — the evening dress of the Oriental tropics. He recognized Zoros, the Soviet trade commis-

sioner, who seemed to be contemptuously happy over being the only guest not in evening clothes. A small, slightly hunched figure in wrinkled whites, Zoros stopped to talk for a few furtive moments with Graf von Sturm, monocled German vice-consul. Captain Beeker flitted across the scene, important, imperious, stopping for a curt nod and a phrase with Derain, a rich Frenchman from Pondicherry.

Cort muttered to himself as he saw Simpson, his news editor, make a nervously dapper entry. Simpson always went to Government House affairs "to make a killing among the wives of bureaucracy," as he frequently boasted. He appeared to be looking for some one. He snatched a drink from the tray of every bearer he passed.

After him Cort saw Franklin Jones, the latest addition to the American colony, whom he had photographed in his bath. Even had he not recognized him fully dressed, Cort would have known him for a recent arrival in Calcutta. Jones wore an all black dinner jacket and, despite the technical beginning of the "cold weather," was perspiring profusely in its temperate zone warmth. He was in earnest conversation with the Rajah of Geopord, a gorgeous, fiercely bearded prince who looked constantly and cautiously about him, nodding occasionally to make the jewelled pendant at the front of his turban swing and sparkle. Jones and the rajah walked rapidly away, disappearing in the crowd that moved and shifted.

A stupid assignment, Cort thought. A stupid picture, but one he would get for the sole reason that people had said he could not. Jaganath Mullick ought to be in position by now. . . .

Suddenly Harry Cort's scalp tingled. He heard the click of a lock, turned and saw a glimmer of light as the door to the office opened and closed. He stood tense, listening.

There were men standing in the dark at the opposite end of the room — two men, evidently. One man spoke in a low murmur that reached Cort's ears as a blur. The other spoke quietly but distinctly and was obviously an American.

"I haven't got it with me," the American voice was saying. "I told you I'd bring it tomorrow night. You've sent out a call to have all the boys there, haven't you?"

A mumble came from the second man.

"Midnight, sure," said the American voice. "How do you get to this Munshi Amir's bazaar, anyhow?"

Another murmur.

"No, honestly, I haven't ——"

The American voice broke off. There was a grunt, two thuds,

the scuffle of feet.

Cort heard panting, the sounds of men grappling, coming nearer. A chair was overturned near him. He could make out shadows whirling, wrestling, felt the warmish air fanned by struggling bodies. He flattened himself in his corner, fascinated by this battle between two unseen combatants.

The sounds of fighting ended as suddenly as they had begun. There was a groan. Feet moved quickly across the floor. The door opened and closed. The lock clicked. Silence flowed through the darkness.

Harry Cort remained motionless for a long minute, uncertain, puzzled by the predicament into which he had been thrust. He was trying to orient himself. He was under the impression that only one man had left the room. Yet if the other were still present, he gave no sign of life. Cort strained his ears.

At the end of a minute he became aware of a faint sound — a soft, rhythmic tatoo, like the drip of rain off the eaves. The sound was insistent, originating somewhere near the centre of the room. Cort took a few steps in the darkness, then stopped to listen again. The dripping continued with ominous monotony. He moved again. The drops seemed to fall at his feet.

Crouching slightly so that his body would form a screen between his hands and the window, Cort struck a match. Almost before the yellow bud of fire had blossomed into a flare, he had pinched it out with his fingers. He had seen enough.

The brief glow had revealed a man stretched awkwardly across a desk, arm and legs sprawling, wide eyes staring at the ceiling. A knife pierced a red splotch in a starched shirt. Blood was dripping over the edge of the desk.

The man wore a black dinner jacket. He was the enigmatic person Calcutta had known for several days only as Franklin Jones.

Harry Cort stretched out his hand in the dark, grasped an inert arm. He found the wrist. The flesh was warm. His fingers sought the pulse. There was none.

For the first time in his career Cort forgot a picture assignment. A dead man was no novelty to him. He had rubbed elbows with death many times in his life, always with perfect equanimity. Yet this corpse sharing the same circumscribed darkness seemed to exude a strange, indefinable horror, to cast a spell of impotence over Cort. A spasm of panic passed through him. He wanted to run. Then he took control of himself and remembered his camera.

Quickly he dismantled the pod, slipped his graflex into its case and slung the strap across his shoulder. Cautiously he picked his way to the opposite end of the office, turned the door knob slowly, pulled. The door did not give. He turned the knob the other way. Still no result. The door held fast. The murderer had locked his victim in — and Harry Cort with him.

The drip of blood continued.

Cort turned and almost ran back to the windows. He opened the centre pane a little wider and leaned out. It was only a few feet to the ground. The window was in a shadow, fortunately. He'd slip out that way. He'd have a hard time explaining how he came to be locked up with a corpse, particularly as Beeker had barred him from Government House.

He threw one leg over the window sill — then blinked.

A great sheet of luminosity blinded him. The viceroy was arriving and Jaganath Mullick had fired the flash as he had been instructed. But instead of the flare revealing the viceroy to Cort's lens, it exhibited to the waiting guests the spectacle of Harry Cort making an unceremonious exit from a Government house window.

After a stunned second, Cort saw through the veil the flash had thrown before his eyes. He saw faces again — the Rajah of Gaepore's beard, Graf von Sturm adjusting his monocle, Simpson hurrying feverishly through the crowd. But in all the confused impression, one face stood out: that of Captain Reginald Beeker, scowling in amazement under his diminutive moustache.

Cort jumped and ran. He did not look again at the military secretary. He did not have to look to know that the fussy little Beeker was already bustling officiously about, giving orders for Cort's seizure. Cort saw complications piling up. He waited for no forcible ejection.

He found himself outside the grounds, walking rapidly down Old Court House Street. A motor car drove past him, slowed down as though waiting for him to catch up, then sped on again.

Cort quickened his step to a near run. His camera case banged against his hip in annoying rhythm with his stride. He swore. He was not running away. He merely wanted to think, and the only place he knew possessed the proper solitude and quiet was his dark-room in the *Diplomat* office.

He turned at the *Diplomat* gate, crossed the compound, rushed past the dozing *jamadar*. As he slammed the door of his dark-room behind him, he breathed a sigh of relief. This was familiar darkness, a warm darkness that smelled pleasantly of hypo and developer and

drying plates. To most people these chemical odours would have been unpleasant, but to Cort, sweat soaked and jumpy, they were a soothing friendly fragrance.

He stood for a moment getting his breath, telling himself not to be a damned fool. What had he to be nervous about? He had nothing to do with the killing of Franklin Jones. As a matter of fact, he did not even know who had killed him — or why. He groped along the wall, felt for the switch and snapped on the red light. He liked the calm dimness of the ruby working lamp. . . .

The liquids in the shallow developing trays turned to blood as the red light suffused itself through the darkness. Cort took a surprised step backward. The ruddy rays fell full upon a face — an Oriental face, a sombre mask, cruel in its stolidity. The face seemed to be detached, floating in the dark, as it rose from the shadows to catch the glow of the red lamp.

"*Chel ao!*" ordered Cort after the first impact of astonishment. "Nobody's allowed in here."

The face remained motionless a moment before the lips formed perfect English words—

"I want the plates you exposed tonight."

"Who the hell are you?" demanded Cort.

"Give me the plates — all you have taken today. Better give them peacefully."

Cort stared. The Indian was tall and gave an impression of power despite strangely hunched shoulders. He moved towards Cort with a peculiar, twisting walk. For a second Cort's memory dropped back to the motor car that had slowed up in Old Court House Street. Had the murderer seen Cort climbing out the window of the death room, and sent his man to destroy possible photographic evidence against him? Or was this man the murderer?

"Who sent you here?" Cort asked.

"I can offer you five thousand rupees for all the plates you exposed today." A roll of bills flashed in the dim light.

"Put your money away," said Cort.

"Ten thousand is the outside limit. I warn you not to bargain for more. Sell?"

"No!" said Cort without hesitation. "Not for ten *lakhs*. Who ——"

Cort's words were cut short by a blow to the mouth. He fell back against his work bench. The shock upset a plate rack. A dozen negatives fell with a ringing clatter of broken glass. Cort struck back. His fist thudded into flesh. There was a grunt.

The Indian vanished in the shadows for a second, then leaped grotesquely to the work

bench. He began pulling down boxes, kicking over trays, smashing bottles. Cort grabbed his leg. The fixing bath upset.

The invader sprang, caught Cort around the neck, and clutched at the camera case still hanging over the photographer's shoulder. Cort tore him loose. Again he sprang, this time swinging on the strap, yanking, twisting. A knee caught Cort in the groin. He winced. In that instant the case was borne to the floor. There was a crash of glass.

"Right on the plate holder," Cort muttered, leaping to retrieve his camera. As he grasped a remnant of the shoulder strap, the door opened and the intruder disappeared. He was satisfied with his wrecking activities.

Cort made no effort to give chase. With great tenderness, he was examining his camera. Like a nurse with an injured child, he went over the box, opened and closed the diaphragm, peered at the lens, tried the mirror release, felt the ground glass focusing screen. finally he removed the magazine plate holder from the back. He could feel the broken glass mover under his fingers. The plates were wrecked, all right. Lucky there weren't any pictures there anyway. He wound up the focal plane shutter and watched the metal bound slits zip past as he released them one by one. The shutter still worked. All in all, the only damage was to the plates. Lucky. . . .

Again the door burst open. Jaganath Mullick stood gesticulating with a flashlight gun, his eyes wide with excitement.

"Quick!" breathed the panting *babu*. "By backside door, please. No time for wasting."

"What's the idea?" demanded Cort.

"Quick!" repeated the *babu*. "Police just now coming. Two inspector sahibs, one constable and three *pahare-wallas*, all expectant over arrest of Mister Cort for murdering of Mister Jones."

"Me? Why should I run? I didn't kill anybody."

"All substantial e v i d e n c e pointing your side. Witnesses seeing you exuding from murdering room by window will swear same. Door locked thus delaying crime discovery. But perhaps you know who are actual genuine assassins?"

"Nope," said Cort. "I don't."

"Then by all means quicken your steps," said the *babu*. "*Ghari* is waiting as aforementioned at backside door. Quick!"

Cort hesitated a brief moment. Then he followed the rotund Bengali. After all, he might as well think over things tonight and decide what he wanted to do in the morning. If he were

taken by the police now, he wouldn't have an alibi in the world to offer. Why not disappear for the night and work up his case, if possible?

The *ghari* Jaganath Mullick had procured was a closed vehicle. The *ghari-walla* was nonchalantly feeding hay to his bony horse. Mullick pushed him back into his seat as Cort was climbing inside. The cab jogged down the street, through Bow Bazaar, then Mirzapur Street. As they turned into Amber Street, the horse slowed down. Jaganath Mullick poked his head out and saw the white uniform of a policeman standing in the middle of the road. He quickly withdrew his head and knocked against the roof of the cab.

"Do not stop for *pahare-walla,*" he said as loudly as he dared. But the vehicle had stopped.

The brown policeman touched his red turban and inquired what time it was. The *ghari-walla* didn't know. The policeman put one foot on the step and wondered if the passengers inside might not know the time. The driver said he thought they might.

"Ten minutes to one," shouted Jaganath Mullick in an alarmed tenor.

The *ghari* started again, rattled down dark streets past the leper asylum, wound into narrow ways lined with mud huts whose bamboo frames bulged under the weight of their tile roofs. After an apparently aimless ride down one alley and up another, the *babu* dismissed the *ghari.* "He will never remember where he has brought us," said Jaganath Mullick. "And in addition my aunt lives at slight distance from this place."

The aunt's domicile which was to serve as temporary hiding place for Cort was hidden behind a collection of huts at the end of a crooked lane. It consisted of one room, already occupied by an asthmatic toothless old woman, a hump-backed bull, household utensils of brass and earthenware, seven hundred mosquitoes and sundry lesser insects. After spending the rest of the night there, lying sleepless on the swept mud floor, listening to the sonorous breathing of the old woman and the bull, inhaling warm odours of *ghee,* coconut oil and bovine vapours, Cort knew he wanted to return to his office in the morning, risk false arrest, and explain everything the best he could. He would wait, however, until the arrival of Jaganath Mullick. The *babu* had promised to appear early in the morning with news, and food designed for Occidental stomachs.

Mullick came soon after his aunt and the bull were up. He was still pop-eyed. He handed Cort a sandwich with one hand

and a newspaper with the other.

Well, there he was. Even the sedate, leisurely British headline style of the *Diplomat* managed to convey an undercurrent of sensation in the murder of Franklin Jones. The most scandalous part of the business was that it had occurred at Government House, practically in the presence of the viceroy:

REGRETTABLE INCIDENT
At SOIREE

———

Crime at Government House

———

VICEROY'S VISIT MARRED

———

Photographer Suspected of Murdering American

The suspect, of course, was Harry Cort. Circumstantial evidence was pretty strong. Furthermore, the newspaper account declared that Cort was not only a murderer, but also head of a huge dope smuggling ring. The American consulate-general had revealed the existence of an international organization that annually smuggled millions of dollars' worth of Indian opium and its derivative morphine into the United States.

The late Franklin Jones had appeared at the American consulate with United States Government credentials, announced that he was fast unearthing the Indian sources of the illicit narcotic trade, and was soon to co-operate with Calcutta police in killing the business at its roots, the press was informed.

Instead, he had been killed by one of the dope gang who recognized him as a detective, and who also stole the man's credentials and identity papers

Cort, the newspaper said, had been posing as a photographer merely to mask his smuggling activities. He had disappeared after the killing, first wrecking his dark-room which was believed to contain damaging evidence!

"That settles it," mumbled Cort, wolfing his sandwich. "I'm going down and have it out."

"But the police, sir?"

"I'll take a chance. Hell, I'm not guilty of anything."

Jaganath Mullick waggled his head and executed several contortions of his fat shoulders to indicate resigned incomprehension of the American's reasoning.

"How about cigarettes?" asked Cort, licking the crumbs from his fingers.

"Ah, quite so," said the *babu*, fishing in the pocket of the European style coat he affected while on assignment with Cort. "I have purchased one tin of Panchpachpan, which I ——"

Jaganath Mullick stopped abruptly and stared at his hands. His chubby fingers clasped a

crumpled envelope against the yellow cylinder of the cigarette tin. With his left hand he reached over and extracted the paper, turned it over, while the puzzled expression about his eyes grew. He handed it to Cort.

"This must be for you," he said.

The envelope bore Cort's name, but no address.

"Where did you get this?" Cort demanded.

"Regretfully can not say."

"I suppose it grew in your pocket — like the mango trick."

"Conceivably," said the *babu.*

Cort ripped open the envelope. His eyebrows moved together a fraction of an inch as he read. He snorted and pushed the paper under the eyes of Jaganath Mullick who, in an awed voice, spelled out:

"You are real wrong in holding out for more money. You were offered the limit last night and you refused. You are dead right in keeping under cover. It is the healthiest thing to do. A sea voyage would be even healthier. We will furnish you the ticket and safe passport if you send your assistant to the man you know. Should you feel inclined to talk to the police, remember that we have killed in the past and will gladly do so again."

When he had finished, Jaganath Mullick stared at the paper, speechless.

"You don't know who could have stuck this chit in your pocket this morning?" Cort asked.

"No, sir," said the *babu.* "I stopped only for purchasing paper in front of Great Eastern, and for obtaining cigarettes at tobacconist's."

"Nobody talked to you?"

"Talking, no. People of all castes and sexes were brushing against me in tobacconist's shop, too many to remember."

Cort took the note and reread it.

"'Send your assistant to the man you know,'" he quoted. Evidently this bird thinks I saw the whole business and am holding out for bigger hush money. If I only knew who the guy was, I'd bluff him."

"But you do not."

"I heard talk in the dark before Jones got killed, but it wasn't much. Jones was supposed to meet the gang tonight at Munshi Amir's bazaar. At midnight." Cort lighted a cigarette, and stared into space until the match burned his fingers. "By jove an idea!"

"You will notify police of proposed meeting, expecting arrests?"

"Hell, no, Mullick!" An excited gleam came into Cort's grey eyes. He grabbed the *babu's* arm eagerly. "No cops in this, Mullick. If that gang shows up on schedule tonight, it'll be the

best damn news picture of the year for Calcutta. Go get me some fresh plates and the flash gun. Tonight at midnight I'll go to Munshi Amir's bazaar and make the shot. It'll be great. I can see the captions already: 'Dope Ring Sought In Murder Caught By Camera.' Except that they don't write captions like that on the *Diplomat*. And if I can make the picture to go with my story, it might clear me. See, Mullick?"

"But what in case discovered by narcotic gentlemen?"

"God only knows what."

Jaganath Mullick wagged his head once.

"All you have to worry about is getting me the plates and the flashlight gadgets," said Cort. "I'll do the rest. You don't even have to come back here yourself. In fact, you'd better not. People seem to know you're seeing me. Anybody follow you out?"

"Partially," said the *babu*. "Changing *gharis* by ruse I came last distance without following."

"Don't come back before dark. If anything urgent turns up, send a *chaprassi* that nobody knows and who don't know me . . . So long, Mullick."

A sticky wind fanned the day into a glaring flame that slowly faded to a warm grey ember on which night trod, scattering stars and strange odours. A suggestion of coolness came hesitantly through the silhouettes of *tal* palms. Harry Cort squatted on the mud floor of the hut, smoking furiously in an effort to discourage a cloud of mosquitoes brazenly ignoring the seasonal change.

A rotund figure blotted out the dim light in the doorway. Cort stood up.

"What news?"

"Distressful news only," said Jaganath Mullick. "*Lakhs* of people have been questioning me. Police in scores have invaded *Diplomat* offices. News editor sahib promising co-operation for bringing you to justice."

"Simpson? The lousy bum! What's the idea?"

"*Izzat*. Honour of *Diplomat* appearing jeopardized in not aiding search for criminal photographer. Possibly so informed by Captain Beeker after long windy conference."

"Of course, Beeker! Then they've certainly had you follower out here tonight."

"Unsuccessfully so," replied Mullick. "Again changing *gharis* by ruse, I evaded suspicious follower."

"You came right here from the office?"

"Well, not quite exactly," said the *babu*, "having made brief halt at domicile for son's small camera ——"

"You and that damned Brownie of yours!" broke in Cort. "Sure as hell there was

somebody hanging around your place to pick up your trail."

"Hardly probable," said Mullick, "since coming halfway by foot power expressly for throwing off scent. Very sorry about son's small camera. However, for greatest news photo of year ——"

"I told you you didn't have to come along."

"Am just now volunteering."

Cort was silent a moment. Then he said:

"All right, Mullick. Let's go."

He slung his camera across his shoulder and started out the door. Jaganath Mullick followed; then, with quick, waddling steps, came abreast of Cort.

"This way, this way. We have got to turn left," said Jaganath Mullick in a thick whisper. "I know where is *ghari* parking very near from end of lane."

As Cort and the *babu* swung into a narrow cross alley, a figure of a tall Indian, powerful looking despite a stooped frame emerged from the shadows and followed them. He moved with an odd, twisting walk.

Munshi Amir's bazaar is outside the eastern limits of Calcutta proper. It lies beyond the Sealda and Mutla stations, on the north bank of the Balliawhata Canal. Cort and Jaganath Mullick left their *ghari* before they got to Palmer's Bridge, and made the last fifty yards or so on foot.

A bustling place by day, the bazaar was deserted at midnight. The American and the Bengali walked stealthily through dark lines of closed shops and stalls. They saw sleeping ranks of ghostly palms guarding the dark waters of the canal. They heard the minor song of some one chanting *mantras* far on the other side. A light glimmered in the distance. They made the circuit of the bazaar without seeing signs of life. Suddenly Jaganath Mullick clutched Cort's arm and pointed.

Immediately before them a faint, wavering light glowed in the second storey window of the only two-storey house in the alley. They could see only mottled, ruddy patches on the ceiling. Cort decided to investigate.

He climbed to the roof of an adjoining one-storey structure. The sloping, tiled roof of a Bengali hut is never built to be walked upon, yet the roof offered the only possible base for operations. Cort felt the bamboo ridge pole sag creakingly as he allowed his weight to settle on the tiles.

Standing as near the eaves as he dared, he found he could lean his hands against the two-storey house. He worked his way carefully to the lighted window. He looked in.

Cort saw six men bending their heads together around a table. It was hard to recognise

faces in the dim flicker of a tiny oil light. Three of the men were apparently Hindus. Two might be Eurasians. One was apparently white. He was one of the three who sat with their backs to the window.

The white man was talking. He could not hear his voice. For a moment he thought he recognized a mannerism in one man's gestures. The sense of familiarity gave Cort a perculiar start. His imagination must be playing tricks on him. Anyhow, the furtive, tense expression on the faces he could see told him that this was the group he was looking for. It was worth the risk to make the picture.

Cort signalled Jaganath Mullick, who was still on the ground. The babu passed the paraphernalia. Then Cort pulled him to the roof.

As the *babu* sat on the tiles, panting silently, shifting his feet uncertainly, Cort took another look through the window. He saw a revolver lying on the table close to the hand of the white man. Who was that white man, anyhow? He was showing some papers — official looking documents. Even in the dim light of the oil lamp, Cort thought he made out an American eagle on one of the sheets. He might be mistaken, of course, but if that were actually a United States Government seal, the papers were probably the stolen credentials of the late Franklin Jones. If they were — well, that settled everything.

Cort wondered briefly what his chances would be to leap through the window and capture the six men and evidence single handed. Not very good, he decided. He was so hopelessly outnumbered that such an act would be practically suicide. The long chance appealed to him, though. . . . Still, the picture came before anything else. First he would make a flash of this gang while the documents were still on the table. Once he had a negative, he could stampede the meeting. The flash might startle them enough so that he could bluff his way to victory, leaving the camera with Jaganath Mullick in case of accident.

He turned and motioned to Mullick to stand by. The *babu* was fussing with his own camera again, damn him. Cort suppressed an oath. This was not the time for swearing. He raised the focusing hood of his own graf lex — then stopped to listen. He heard some one walking, directly below him.

Jaganath Mullick had evidently heard the same thing, for he was staring at Cort with apprehension.

Cort crouched, to reduce visibility from the ground. The sound of footsteps ceased. After a moment of silence, the steps began again — faint, cautious.

This time Cort saw a shadow moving.

He could make out nothing except that the figure was that of a large man who slunk, rather than walked, pausing a moment at the corner of the house, a vague dark blur in the starlight. The man was in an attitude of listening.

Cort held his breath. Mullick was a statue. Seconds ticked by and the dark blur remained motionless. Suddenly the man vanished around the corner of the house. Cort breathed. Mullick moved an arm.

Cort stood up again, leaned forward and carefully put his camera on the window ledge. Peering into the focusing hood, he made the image sharp on the ground glass. Perfect. The group was just far away enough to bring both sides of the table into the same focal range. If he could only make the white man turn around — perhaps if he shouted just before he fired the flash. That would be dangerous, but he and Mullick could probably get away all right.

He opened his shutter. He was ready to expose. He'd better hurry while everything was in place. He put a cap under the clip in the bottom of the flash pan. He looked up, as he thought he heard the sound of a door closing. Then with his teeth he took the cork from a bottle of flash powder and poured a little mound on top of the cap. He started to hand the flash gun to Jaganath Mullick, who was busy arranging his Brownie on the sill beside Cort's camera.

At that moment Cort saw a new figure make an excited entrance into the room. It was a tall, slightly hunched Indian who walked rapidly with a strange, twisting movement. In the cruel lines of the face Cort recognized his adversary of the dark-room scuffle the night before.

The newcomer uttered a few quick, vehement words, pointing at the window through which Cort was peering. The six men about the table rose as one. The white man seized the revolver and whirled. A gasp of astonishment escaped Cort.

But Cort's automatic sense of pictorial values triumphed over his surprise. He reacted instantaneously to the perfect pose. His forefinger, hooked into the loop of the flash gun release, contracted.

A great blinding cloud of light burst, then puffed out into a rolling cloud of smoke.

Taken unaware by the flash, Jaganath Mullick uttered a frightened cry, started up, tottering on the edge of the roof, clinging to his little box camera.

The white man was charging the window, revolver in hand. The flash glinted luridly on the drawn, tense face of J. Harte

Simpson, news editor of the *Diplomat!* Simpson fired.

Jaganath Mullick slipped, fell back heavily on the fragile roof. There was a clatter of tiles and the crack of bamboo as the *babu's* weighty body sank into the roof as though it were quicksand. He disappeared downward in an avalanche of tiles.

Cort felt the roof sway and give under his feet as the tiles slid off after Mullick. Instinctively he grabbed for the ledge before him. At the same moment he heard the crash of glass and felt his wrists seized. His arms were nearly yanked from their sockets as he was dragged into the room. Something struck him on the head. He struggled to his feet, pulling one arm free. He was kicked in the side. Resounding pain smashed against one ear. He saw a brown face, struck out, felt his other arm released.

He was surrounded by the Indians and Eurasians. Vaguely he saw Simpson standing clear of the fight, leering behind the threat of his revolver. He saw a grimacing Eurasian raise a chair. Cort kicked him half across the room. He worked fists, elbows and knees in all directions. He butted and punched as brown men came at him from all sides. He sidestepped, swung a long right, and saw the hunched Indian of the dark room collapse on the floor.

Cort was faring better than the odds entitled him. The sheer desperation of his plight, together with the faint hope that Jaganath Mullick had not been hurt in the fall and might return, converted him into a veritable demon. His knuckles bleeding, his clothes ripped, he bowled over Indian after Eurasiasm, dodged blows, kicked off tacklers.

Then J. Harte Simpson stepped up behind him and struck him down with the barrel of his revolver.

Struggling back to consciousness through a splitting headache, Cort found himself lying on the floor, bound hand and foot. He was helpless.

The thin-faced Simpson was standing over him, Cort's camera in his hand. The panting, bedraggled men of colour stood behind Simpson.

"Damned meddler!" Simpson breathed. "I told you that American brass of yours would get you into trouble. What's more, I warned you in writing that if you didn't keep your damned Yankee nose out of this mess, that you'd get killed. You came anyhow — you and your ruddy flashlight camera. Well, it's your funeral."

Simpson swung the graflex against the wall several times. The sound of shattering glass and splintering wood was tor-

ture to Cort. He gritted his teeth.

"Here!" Simpson tossed the battered camera to a sad-eyed Eurasian. "Take this out and get ride of it. Sink it for good. Now."

The Eurasian took the broken remains of the camera and left the room.

"And you—" Simpson handed his gun to the stoop-shouldered giant with a turban. "You, Sang-dil, take *this* out and get rid of it." He indicated Harry Cort.

Cort glared as the tall, turbaned Hindu walked over to him, hooked his fingers under the rope that bound Cort's arms, and pulled him to his feet.

"Drag the snooping rat as far as the canal," Simpson continued. "Hold the muzzle close against him so the shot won't make too much noise, and let him drop into the water. If any one finds him before the jackals pull him apart, it can pass for suicide. I'll leave this in your hands, Sang-dil. Rush it through. I'm going."

Simpson paused at the door, bowed to Cort with mock politeness and disappeared.

Cort glanced about him. It looked like the last act, all right. No chance of Jaganath Mullick coming back. The *babu* was probably still running — unless he happened to be sitting down to catch his breath. Or he might have been knocked out when the roof caved in under him.

Sang-dil pushed Cort towards the door. Cort doubled up suddenly, slipped from his grasp, and came to life again. Fighting as fiercely as his bonds allowed, he hopped about, head down, butting over two men. Then Sang-dil clipped him on the jaw, renewed his hold, and ordered two Eurasians to seize his feet. The rest of the crowd went out first. Then Cort found himself being lifted bodily and carried down a dark staircase feet first.

He had barely started the descent when hurried footsteps sounded on the stairs below, and a hoarse whisper cut the dark:

"Sang-dil! Sang-dil!" a voice called.

"Kya hai?"

The men who were carrying Cort stopped. A man brushed past and muttered some rapid Hindustani to Sang-dil. The big Hindu dropped Cort. The American fell like a log, striking his head on a stone step. He heard feet running away. He felt hot breath on his face as some one bent over him. He was aware of a hand, fumbling in his breast pocket. He thought something was plucking at his bonds. More footsteps followed — then silence.

He sat up. He tried to move his numbed arms and found he could raise them stiffly from his sides. He stretched his legs. He was free. His bonds had been

cut. Reaching forward, he picked up a revolver.

He clutched the gun, got painfully to his feet and started down the stairs. A little dazed, he wondered what lay before him in the dark. Every few steps he stopped and listened. He thought he heard sounds outside.

When he was nearly at the bottom of the stairway the outside door flew open. The glare of three electric torches blinded him. He stepped back for one confused second. Then he brandished his gun shouting:

"*Chale jao!* No tricks, or I'll blow you all to hell!"

As he stood blinking at the light, he realized that he could see behind it. He was vaguely aware of men in uniform. He lowered his gun. Immediately men sprang, tackled him, bore him to the ground. Handcuffs glistened a moment, then snapped about Cort's wrists. The gun was twisted away.

"Got 'im!" exclaimed a cockney voice.

More lights illuminated the scene. More uniforms appeared. The place swarmed with police. European constables with spiked moustaches, Eurasians shouting in *chi-chi* accents. *Jahare-wallas* with red turbans. Cort saw many men he knew, men he had laughed and joked with on picture stories during the past year. No one was laughing now. They were all cold and efficient. They pushed Cort towards an automobile in which a portly deputy commissioner sat.

"Hello, Reynolds," said Cort. "You're five minutes too late."

"I'd say we were just in time, Cort. Sorry to see you under these circumstances."

"What circumstances?"

"You know damned well you're wanted for murder. We've been after you since yesterday; might still be looking, if we hadn't been informed you'd be here tonight."

"Didn't my *babu* come for you just now?"

"Nobody came for us. We received an anonymous chit saying that the murderer of Franklin Jones would be in Munshi Amir's bazaar at half after midnight."

"The murderer's been here," said Cort, "but he's gone. I came here to photograph him for your benefit."

"Photograph him?" The deputy commissioner laughed. "Were you taking pictures of my men with that gun of yours?"

"That wasn't my gun. That belonged to Simpson. One of the gang dropped it on the stairs when they ran."

Again the deputy commissioner laughed. He wasn't expected to believe that story, was he? Early evidence already pointed to Cort as murderer of Franklin Jones. His story about the flash-

light didn't check with the facts. There was no trace of any camera in the house, and no trace of ropes with which Cort said he had been bound. And where were all these ruffians that were supposed to fill the house? Better search him, men.

Constables went through Cort's pockets. One of them brought out a sheaf of official looking papers. The deputy commissioner examined them and stared.

"And these credentials of the late Mr. Franklin Jones, stolen from him when he was murdered — I suppose you just borrowed these to photograph them, too?"

"They — why, they planted 'em on me!" exclaimed Cort.

The ghost of a humourless, pitying smile crossed the deputy commissioner's face.

"Sorry, Cort," he said. "You're not plausible. I wish I could believe you, but ——"

Twenty minutes later, still handcuffed, Cort sat in an uncomfortable chair, dripping with perspiration, while police inquisitors pelted him with questions.

"I tell you there's no damned accomplices because I didn't commit any damned crime!" Cort repeated for the fifteenth time.

"Kindly be polite," cautioned a severe police official from beneath a motionless grey moustache.

"If you are as innocent as you make out, how did you happen to know of this rendezvous you describe at Munshi Amir's bazaar?" demanded the corpulent Reynolds.

Did he have to go into that again? He'd already told them a dozen times that he overheard talk in the dark, the night Jones was killed. Jones had evidently promised money to his murderer and accomplices. He didn't recognize the other man at the time, but it was obviously Simpson. Yes, J. Harte Simpson of the *Diplomat*. That was the man who presided over the party at Munshi Amir's bazaar.

"Ridiculous. Mr. Simpson has called in here several times this evening to inquire if there were any developments. He's probably at his home now, said one inquisitor.

"Send a *chaprassi* to Simpson and ask him to come immediately to the Lal Bazaar police office," ordered Reynolds.

Fine. Cort could ask for nothing easier than to confront Simpson. No, he didn't know that Franklin Jones was a detective come to break up a morphine smuggling ring. Simpson must have known, though. That's why he killed Jones. Jones had evidently been posing as an American agent for the smuggling organization, and had got Simp-

son to send out a call to the *mofussil* to bring his lieutenants in from the country. When Simpson suspected the trap, the boys were probably already on the way, so he put Jones out of the picture.

"You might tell your theory to Mr. Simpson," said Reynolds. "Here he is."

The white-faced Simpson walked jauntily into the room, attired in the short white jacket of formal evening dress.

"Congratulations, Reynolds," he said. "You've found your man."

"Quick change, Simpson," said Cort. "Too bad you couldn't change that scratch on your cheek like you changed your duds."

Simpson smiled superciliously.

"If you must know," he said, "that scratch was inflicted by the wife of a high Bengal official."

"Liar!" Cort shouted. An echo of his exclamation seemed to come from the anteroom.

"I didn't come here to be insulted by a common dope peddler and murderer!"

"Go see who's making that row in the anteroom," directed Reynolds to a subordinate, as shrill sounds of an altercation in Hindustani continued.

Investigation was unnecessary, however, for Jaganath Mullick bounded excitely into the room despite the efforts of two native policemen who were hopelessly outweighed. He was brandishing a large bromide print, still damp.

"Look, Mister Cort," he said. "You said Brownie camera unsuitable for making sharp negatives. You said respectable enlargements beyond capacities of yours truly Mullick. You intimated that ten thousand years insufficient for Mullick to learn process of making print from wet negative. Behold answer to all objections."

He held out a perfect picture of the group at Munshi Amier's bazaar as the flash went off. There slight blurs of movement, but the faces were all unmistakable. There was a full-faced view of Simpson, revolver in hand, charging towards the lens. There was a suggestion of the Franklin Jones papers on the table.

"Take a *dekko* at that!" crowed Cort.

"I shouldn't give too much attention to a *babu*," said Simpson haughtily.

"This checks with Cort's story," said Reynolds. "Here's Simpson with a gun. Good Lord, here's Sang-dil, convicted murderer who escaped from the Andamans last year. Here's Dhobi Das —"

"Trick photography," insisted Simpson. "Some composite picture they've concocted betweeen them."

"No such trickery used," interrupted Jaganath Mullick. "Here is negative dried in haste by spirit of wine in manner instructed by Mister Cort."

"Let's see." Simpson grabbed at the film. The manacled Cort leaped to block him. A detective intervened.

"Will you pardon this intrusion?"

Two newcomers stood in the doorway. One was Fuller, blue-eyed American consul. The other was a dark man with bushy eyebrows. His head was bandaged and he carried his right arm in a sling.

"I'd like to introduce Mr. Franklin Jones," said the consul.

There was a puzzled, incredulous silence.

"Franklin Jones?" queried the deputy police commissioner.

"Mr. Jones was beaten, robbed, left for dead and locked in a goods van attached to the Punjab Express last week," said the consul. "He recovered consciousness in a Patna hospital, and came here as soon as he heard what had taken place."

"Then who was the man we buried this afternoon as Franklin Jones?" demanded the deputy police commissioner.

"An enterprising narcotics smuggler of New York and Bombay," explained Jones, "who stole my papers after he thought he had killed me. Illicit export of Indian morphine to the United States is carried on by two large organizations. One operates from Calcutta, the other from Bombay. The Bombay ring has long intended to absorb the rival organization and it was in pursuit of their expansion programme that the Bombay gentleman assumed my identity. By first posing as an American agent of the Calcutta organization, he hoped to get their confidence. At the proper moment he would gain control of his rivals by revealing himself as a representative of the American Government."

"The rat!"

"You might explain that remark, Mr. Simpson," said the deputy police commissioner, arising to face Simpson.

Simpson did not reply. He glanced about him desperately. Then he sat down heavily.

"What have I to explain?" he asked in a low voice. "There is no accusation against me."

"Oh, yes, there is," said Franklin Jones. ' 'I have some pretty definite information against you — letters in your handwriting which I seized in the United States."

Simpson's chin went up, and his eyes flashed.

"Why should we believe this man?" he demanded. "How do we know he is not an impostor, and that the real Jones was not actually killed?"

Without a word Jones stepped

to the deputy commissioner's desk, fumbled with the papers lying there and examined the passport which bore his name. With his good hand he produced a pen knife, which he opened with his teeth. He carefully slipped the point of the blade under the photograph on the passport, and worked it back and forth until he could peel off the picture of the murder victim. His own photograph was underneath.

The deputy police commissioner nodded to two European constables who immediately grasped Simpson by each arm.

Jaganath Mullick nudged Cort.

"Again photography triumphing over falsehood," he said gleefully. "What would world do without us photographers, eh, Mister Cort?"

"Listen, Mullick," said Cort. "You did a swell job. I got to hand it to you. But tell me one thing. Why did you go off and leave me with that pack of hyenas in the bazaar?"

"You inferred pictures more important," said Jaganath Mullick, "and I knew police arriving soon, having sent unanimous chit asking expedition at 12:30. Was slightly fearful earlier arrival might spoil flashlight. However, nothing spoiled, eh, Mister Cort?"

"No," said Cort, feeling a sore rib, "nothing."

NEXT MONTH—

ANGEL ON MY FOOT
by MANNING COLES

MIDNIGHT RENDEZVOUS
by MARGARET MANNERS

STAR SPANGLED NIGHT
by FREDRIC BROWN

MRS. MUMPSON'S STRANGE PLEASURE
by MIRIAM ALLEN DE FORD

THE SPECIALIST
by JAMES REACH

THE MIRACLE TEA PARTY
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

DEADLY JOKER

A NEW STORY by ROBERT BLOCH

—in the August 1963 issue of THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

the long golfers

by Barry Perowne

It was the stopping of the car that wakened me. I opened my eyes. Sweeping back from the roadside was a noble demesne where ancient oaks spread their shade and fallow deer wandered knee deep in buttercups. In the distance, a battlemented tower with a flagstaff loomed above the foliage, and I saw the familiar banner of the Dukes of Devizes hanging motionless in midsummer sunshine.

"Derehurst Castle!" I said, astonished. "We're back again!"

"Not in the sense you mean, Tim," said my companion. "We're just passers-by now, remember?"

My moment of bemusement passed. I took a cigarette from the case he offered me. We had been in the Navy together when he had succeeded to the dukedom. It had come as a great surprise to him. He had resigned his commission, and had invited me to resign mine and become his estates manager. For a few years we had lived the good life at Derehurst. Then had come an even greater but less pleasant surprise. An Australian claimant

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We first met Prosper Fair in THE DOGS OF FOH (SMM, Jan. 1963). He returns in this latest adventure where once the ungodly have cause to regret the meeting. The author will be remembered for his one-time contributions to the Raffles saga, (RAFFLES AND THE MEANEST THIEF, SDM, Dec. 1956, RAFFLES AND SHIPMATE SADIE, Apr. 1959, and other stories.)

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had brought a law suit – successfully.

It was his banner that flew now – had been flying for the past two years – above those trees. I looked at it with some bitterness as I lighted my cigarette at the match which the ex-Duke held for me.

"What good does that Aussie get out of Derehurst?" I said. "They'll tell me all he does is watch cricket matches on television. I hear he has a set in every room."

"That would take a good many sets, Tim," the ex-Duke said dryly.

He lighted his cigarette, flicked the match over the side of our sports car. He was thirty-five, four years older than me. His blond hair gave him a Navy look. He wore his leather-patched golf jacket with a lean, easy grace. He looked contemplatively at the tranquil Derehurst parkland.

"I couldn't resist detouring a few miles to see the old place again, Tim. The new Duke seems to be keeping it in good heart, doesn't he?

"God knows he can afford to," I said. "You should have accepted the allowance he offered to settle on you. I advised you to, but you wouldn't listen to me. Oh, no! I'm just your business manager." I laughed a bit acidly. "As if an *ex*-Duke had any business to manage!"

"We haven't starved, Tim," he said. "Something's always seemed to turn up."

"In chance we trust," I said. "I'd rather we had the Derehurst rent-roll behind us again. Living on our wits gives me no sense of security. I'm not an optimist like you."

Plain Mr. Fair, as he now was, merely smiled and let in his clutch. Of all his long string of Christian names, the one he chose to use was Prosper. He claimed it was the one that coupled most auspiciously with his surname.

"Well, it's been nice to see Derehurst looking so flourishing," he said, as the seat of the Dukes of Devizes receded behind us.

I could not share his unmalicious satisfaction. My own nature was neither quixotic nor easy-going. Seeing Derehurst Castle for the first time since our eviction – or, rather, since Proper's eviction, for I could have stayed on as estates manager, but had chosen to go with him of my own accord, a deed for which I should have had my head examined – had thoroughly upset me. I remained silent, brooding over our wonderful lost years at Derehurst, as we drove on through the perfect afternoon deeper into the west country.

What roused me, at last, was

a curious sight that caught my eye.

I said, "What are those spidery-looking figures on that hill ahead?"

The road we were on roller-coasted over undulant downland country. We had just topped a rise. Far ahead, two giant human silhouettes, very thin and elongated, stood out starkly white against the green slope to a rounded hilltop.

"Those?" said Prosper. "Those are the prehistoric Long Men of Fedden."

I gazed curiously at the distant giants. Apparently formed by the cutting away of the turf from the underlying chalk, the recumbent figures were face to face, one somewhat taller than the other, each holding a kind of staff or wand pointed downward before him.

"They're one of several Dawn Age chalk-carvings among these downs," the ex-Duke told me. "Archeologists argue about their significance, but nobody really knows. As a matter of fact, Tim, the Long Men of Fedden are the reason for this trip of ours."

My senses alerted. He had a ducal way of pitchforking me without warning into peculiar situations.

I said, "I thought golf was the reason." Our bags were in the back of the car. "You distinctly told me an old friend of yours had invited us down from London for a weekend's golf."

"That's right, Tim. Church Fedden golf course is on the side of Long Men Hill there. Nearby, there's a U.S. Air Force base. A lot of their people play golf on the course — including my friend Walter Matcham, who's Chaplain on the base."

"Chaplain?"

"He's a good golfer in spite of it, Tim. I met him about six years ago in San Diego. I was there in a cruiser on a show-the-flag visit. I had a bit of leave coming to me, and he invited me to spend it at his home in New Mexico. He's a widower with a son and daughter. Young Dick was just a kid then, about nine, but a promising little golfer. He and his Dad and I had some good games together among the cactus and the joshua trees. Dick's fifteen now and over here on a year's exchange scholarship to my old school, and Walter seems worried about it."

"Why? It's one of the most famous schools in England."

"Walter thinks he may not be happy there, Tim. Dick's on vacation from school now, staying with Walter, and they've got themselves involved in a father-and-son golf tournament. It's important to Walter, for some reason — and he says Dick's golf game's gone all to hell. Walter thinks the trouble may be that the boy's not happy at school, but he can't get Dick to talk

about it. That's why Walter telephoned and asked me down this weekend."

"Why?" I asked. "What does he think you can do?"

"I was at the school myself," Prosper explained, "so he hopes that if I talk about my own days there, it might prime the pump and get the boy to open up about his problems."

"What a weekend this is going to be!" I said. "A maladjusted schoolboy — jet 'planes taking off all night just as I get to sleep —"

"Walter lives off the base," Prosper said. "A lot of the personnel with families do. Accommodation's a problem in this rural area, but as Walter's a Chaplain, the Rector of Church Fedden has rented him a wing of the Rectory. Walter thinks a lot of the old fellow."

Our car topped another rise in the road, and the prehistoric silhouettes came into sight again, nearer and larger now, on the hillside ahead.

Prosper laughed. "You know, Tim, some golfer one night, in the Church Fedden clubhouse, propounded the theory that the Long Men of Fedden obviously represent a prehistoric father instructing his son in the correct stance with some neolithic prototype of brassie or niblick."

"I must admit," I said, watching the strange silhouettes, "I can see his point."

"It was the inspiration for this father-and-son tournament Walter Matcham and his boy are involved in," said the ex-Duke. "Walter tells me the remark was overheard by the rich man of the neighborhood, some tycoon called Roger Buckley who's recently settled there and built himself a big house. Buckley promptly put up a trophy for a foursomes tournament open to father-and-son pairs living anywhere in the county or stationed in it on military duty. Walter says there's a strong entry from the air base. They very much want one of their pairs to win the base the right to be the first to hold the Long Golfers."

"That's what the trophy's called?" I asked.

"Yes, and they badly want it on the base. You can understand why, Timmy. The trophy's a scale model of Long Men Hill, done in some jade-green stone, with the prehistoric silhouettes inlaid in silver. Aircrews from the base have been looking down on that hill for nearly twenty years of hot and cold war. The Long Men of Fedden can be seen from a great height. They're a familiar landmark to the personnel of the base. They really mean something." He added, "There's one of their aircraft up there now —"

I followed his glance. The clear sky was aglow with evening. So high as scarcely to be

visible, a solitary aircraft was making a circle of con trail above the hill of the Long Men of Fedden.

At dinner that night in the panelled dining-room of the rambling old Rectory, there were just our two selves, Our Chaplain host Walter Matcham, and his attractive youngsters, Judy and Dick. Judy was over here on vacation from college. She looked about eighteen, and it tickled me to watch her whispered consultations with the Rectory parlourmaid who was waiting on table, a rosy-cheeked girl obviously giddy with the excitement injected into her rural life by the presence of these lodgers from the air base.

The Rector himself was not present. Walter Matcham, a lightly-built, wiry man, tanned and trim in uniform, his crisp hair greying, explained to us, "The Rector keeps pretty much to his own quarters. He's over eighty — a real old-time country clergyman — walks twenty miles a day around the lanes of his parish, making his calls. He's a keen amateur archeologist, too, isn't he, Dick?"

The boy nodded. Already, at fifteen, taller than his father, he looked a natural-born golfer. He had the build.

"If it hadn't been for the Rector," said Walter Matcham, "those prehistoric figures up on the hilltop would have vanished long ago. He's spent most of his spare time for the past fifty years working all alone up there with spade and pick-axe, in all weathers, to redeem and preserve the Long Men from the turf. He got a shoddy reward for it."

"In what way?" Prosper asked.

"The man who used to own the hill," Walter Matcham explained, "promised the Rector to leave those few hilltop acres — valueless except archeologically — to the National Trust, which cares for cultural and historical monuments over here. That's what the Rector always wanted, worked for. But the man apparently forgot his promise. He died intestate, his estate was sold up to meet inheritance taxes, and this millionaire Buckley stepped in and bought the entire hill. It was a bitter disappointment to the Rector."

Young Dick was staring down at his plate. I saw his sister glance at him in a troubled way.

"The Rector went to see Buckley," their father said, "told him about the promise, and suggested Buckley consider deeding those few acres with the Long Men on them to the National Trust himself. Buckley's response was merely abusive. He told the Rector to mind his own ecclesiastical business — and he built a barb-wire fence around the Long Men and put up a 'No

Trespassers' sign. It was a deliberate insult to the Rector."

Walter Matcham smiled rather grimly.

"I don't mind telling you," he said, "that Dick and I took an unchristian satisfaction in beating the Buckleys on the last green in the club's April foursomes."

"The Buckleys?" Prosper said.

"Yes, Roger Buckley's got a son — Edward," said the Chaplain. "He's seventeen and at the same school as Dick — your old school, Prosper. Not that the boys have much to do with each other. As friends of the Rector's, we're anathema to the Buckleys."

"How they must have loved losing to you in the April foursomes!" said the ex-Duke.

"Yes, I'm afraid that didn't sit so well," Walter Matcham said. "But of course, as a friend and tenant of the Rector's, I thought the old man might feel hurt if Dick and I took part in a tournament for a trophy put up by Roger Buckley. So I had no intention of entering us for the Long Golfers, had I, Dick?"

The boy shook his head. He did not look up.

"I had to explain to them, on the base, my reasons for not entering," said the Chaplain, "and they were understood. But I also, unfortunately, had to explain them to Roger Buckley."

"How was that?" Prosper asked.

"It was the day after Dick returned from school for his vacation," said Walter Matcham. "We played a round of golf together. When we went into the clubhouse afterward, the Long Golfers trophy was on display. Buckley and some of his bosom pals—they're a noisy little clique — were standing around admiring it. His son Edward was there, too. Buckley called out to me, 'Hey, padre, how come I don't see you and your boy in the entry list for the Long Golfers?' I just said we weren't entering, and tried to let it go at that. But he wouldn't let it alone, would he, Dick?"

The boy shook his head, and I saw Judy glance at him unhappily.

"Buckley said he'd just that day entered himself and his boy," Walter Matcham went on, "and that they'd been hoping they'd get drawn against us and get their revenge for the April foursomes."

"Buckley's entered for the Long Golfers?" Prosper said, astonished. "But isn't he the donor of the trophy?"

"Just what I said myself — I was so surprised," said the Chaplain. "Buckley flushed. He said, 'The trophy's put up by the *club*'."

"Evidently a face-saving distinction," said Prosper, "because

he can't resist competing himself?"

"Exactly. They'd like to keep the trophy in the clubhouse — against the strong competition from the county and the air base — and the Buckleys are the best father-and-son pair the club's got." Walter Matcham shrugged. "I tried to avoid argument, but he kept on, didn't he, Dick? Why weren't we entered? What had I got against this particular tournament? All this in public, mind you — right there in the clubhouse. It was really embarrassing. Finally, I had no choice but to tell him frankly that in my view the trophy was sponsored by him — and that therefore, as a friend and tenant of the Rector's, I didn't feel at liberty to enter for it."

"How did he take that?"

"He blew his top," said Walter Matcham. "He shouted, 'I know what's behind this! The Rector and the promise he reckons he was given — an old man's pipe-dream, all a load of senile nonsense. But I'm a sporting man here. I'll tell you what I'll do.' And he threw down his challenge."

"Challenge?"

"He said, 'If me and my boy win the Long Golfers, as we think we can, we don't want you people from the base going around afterward saying you never entered your best pair. Right! Here's what I'll do, padre. If you and your boy enter for the Long Golfers, and get drawn against me and my boy and beat us, I'll deed those few hilltop acres to the National Trust myself on the spot — free, gratis and for nothing! Take it or leave it'."

"You took it, of course," said the ex-Duke, with a gleam in his eyes.

"I walked straight across to the noticeboard," said the Chaplain," and wrote our names on the entry list. Dick'll tell you—I couldn't possibly have done otherwise, could I, Dick?"

"No, Dad," the boy muttered.

He looked so miserable that I felt sorry for him. But nothing like so sorry as I felt for him next morning, up on Church Fedden golf course.

What a morning! We were up there so early that, though it was Saturday, we had the course to ourselves. Hawthorns in pink and white bloom dotted the steep hillside. Spiderwebs gleamed like gossamer on every golden gorse-clump. Up on the slope to the hilltop, the gigantic, chalk-white silhouettes of the prehistoric men sparkled with dew. The sound of high-flying aircraft from the base reached us as no more than a remote drone through the singing of innumerable larks.

Yet, by the time we arrived at the sixth green, we none of

us had much to say. I watched Judy putting. A trim little golfer, the sunshine bright on her smooth dark hair, she struck the ball crisply. It rolled a visible trail across the dew-damp turf, dropped into the hole.

"Good shot, partner," Prosper murmured, but got no answering smile from Judy.

I was just walking round with them. I picked Judy's ball out of the cup, replaced the flag. As I handed her ball to her, I could see how troubled she looked. In fact, her young brother's tension had communicated itself more and more painfully to all of us. Starting fairly well, Dick's game – he was, of course, partnering his father – had gone to pieces before our eyes. Several times I had seen Walter give him a sharp look, but Dick's eyes seemed always averted from his father.

The tall boy stalked straight off the green now, pulling his caddie-car, and Judy trailed unhappily after him, pulling hers. The Chaplain stood looking after his children for a moment, then turned to the ex-Duke.

"You see what I mean, Prosper?" Walter said. "What's eating him?"

Prosper lighted a cigarette thoughtfully. "Nerves," he said. "He's pressing – trying too hard. A lot depends on this tournament starting on Tuesday." He glanced up at the Long Men. "You've let him in for something, you know, Walter."

The Chaplain shook his head.

"He's played tournament golf before – and done well. No, I think it's that school. It's doing something to him. I blame myself. I was so darn proud when he won that exchange scholarship that he probably feels he can't make any kick to me about the school. But you were there yourself, Prosper. Try to get him to talk to you."

"I'll try."

We joined the brother and sister on the seventh tee. It was Prosper's drive, and he sent a goodish one up the middle. Dick took his place. I saw the tautness of his thin, tanned face as he stooped to tee his ball. He stepped back, gripping his driver.

"Relax, Dick," his father said. "Take it easy."

He was wasting his breath. Dick hit at the ball as though he hated the sight of it. It went away like a bullet, long and low and straight, then took on a sickening hook and landed in a gorse bush.

His father said, "Dick –"

The boy turned on him sharply. For an instant I feared some regrettable scene, but Judy stepped quickly on to the tee and put a hand on Dick's arm, in warning and restraint.

Prosper said, in his easy way, "You know, I think I may have

a notion where Dick's going wrong. A pro once showed me a dodge that might help. Look, Walter — why don't you and Judy play on together? Tim Shee'll tag along with you. And I'll just show Dick what I have in mind. We'll catch you up presently."

They did not catch us up. Walter, Judy and I had returned to the Rectory in Walter's travel-worn station wagon with its New Mexico numberplates, and the lunch gong was sounding, before Prosper's sports car came humming up the drive.

I sensed a change in young Dick during lunch. Again and again I noticed him studying the ex-Duke surreptitiously, as though puzzled by him. Something obviously had happened between them, and after lunch, when Walter Matcham went off to the base on some duty, Prosper suggested that he and I take a look round the Rectory garden. He drew thoughtfully at his cigarette as we strolled across the velvety old lawn.

"Tim," he said, "that boy's in trouble. He's faced by about as difficult a choice as any fifteen-year-old boy, on an exchange scholarship and son of a Chaplain, could possibly have to make."

"What sort of a choice?" I said.

Mr. Fair looked at me grimly. "The choice between deliberately letting his father down in a golf game that's important to him — or letting him down by getting expelled from school."

I could hardly believe it. I stopped and looked at him. He nodded. "It's true, Tim." He glanced up at the loom of Long Men Hill, the lower slopes dotted now with the midget figures of Saturday afternoon golfers, the giant prehistoric silhouettes higher up chalk-white in the sunshine.

"I got him to talk, Tim." We strolled on across the Rectory lawn. "It seems there's a fellow hangs out near the school who's a regular racegoer. The boys call him the Galloping Major, and apparently some of them have been getting him to put bets on for them. Somebody'd given Dick a tip for Ascot, he needed a bit of extra pocket-money, so he had a bet — and the horse romped home and won him a nice little packet. Instead of paying up, the gallant Major claimed he got to Ascot too late to get Dick's bet on — and handed him his stake money back."

"Having pocketed the winnings?" I said. "Got there too late! The oldest alibi in Turf history!"

Prosper nodded. "Dick told some of his friends to watch their step with the Major — and it turned out he'd pulled the same trick on others. He thought

mere schoolboys would be too afraid of the headmaster finding out they were betting to do anything about it. But Dick and three of his pals are made of sterner stuff. They broke bounds one night just before the vacation, climbed out over the school wall, and went to the Major's house. They tied handkerchiefs over their faces and pounded his front-door knocker. Then intended to grab him when he opened his door, frogmarch him in his pajamas down to a nearby pond, and pitch him into the slime and duckweed."

"The right way to treat a welsher," I said.

"Unfortunately," said Prosper, "they'd no sooner pounded the knocker than the porch-light flashed on and a voice told them to turn around with their hands up. It was the Galloping Major — standing on his path, fully dressed, holding a double-barrelled shotgun."

"He was waiting for them?" I said. "He'd been warned?"

"No question of it," Prosper said. "He made them take off their masks, noted who they were, told them he'd decide at his leisure whether or not to report them to the headmaster, and let them go. The next day but one, the school broke up for the vacation."

"And the boys hadn't been called to the headmaster's study?"

"No. But here's the thing, Tim. You know who warned the Major that the boys were after him? Young Edward Buckley! Dick's quite certain of it. Young Buckley's a pal of the Major's. Now, then! The Buckleys are rich. The Major would do anything to keep in with them. If young Buckley telephones him and tells him to go to the headmaster and report those boys, he'll do it — and expulsion for the boys is a certainty."

Mr. Fair gave me a wry look.

"It throws an interesting light on Buckley Senior, doesn't it? The very day after the boys return from school, Roger Buckley suddenly decides it's the club, not himself, who's the official donor of the Long Golfers trophy — and he enters himself and son as competitors, and makes a big, open-handed gesture, a dramatic 'sporting' challenge in public, that forces Walter Matcham to enter himself and Dick."

"The Buckleys think they've got it wrapped up," I said.

"Of course they do," said Prosper. "Dick says young Edward Buckley never opened his mouth during that scene between the fathers in the clubhouse. He didn't have to. His smirk at Dick was quite enough, Dick says. It said as plain as words that if the Matchams come up against the Buckleys in the Long Golfers, Dick knows

what he'd better do — if he doesn't want the Major to get a telephone call that'll send him hotfoot to the headmaster."

"Blackmail of a fifteen-year-old boy!" I exclaimed.

Prosper nodded. "Roger Buckley's a vain, vindictive show-off — and he's got it in for the Chaplain. Buckley's dangling the Long Men of Fedden like a carrot under Walter's and the Rector's noses — for the sheer, sadistic pleasure of snatching the prize away."

He looked up at the giant prehistoric silhouettes on the hill.

"Well, we shall see, Timmy," he said. "Dick's told Judy the truth. Those two kids, of course, have been out of their minds. They just haven't known what to do. It'd be a shocking blow to Walter if Dick's expelled. Yet —"

"What *can* the boy do?" I said.

"I've told him," said Mr. Fair. "I've told him that if he and Walter come up against the Buckleys, he's to back his father to the hilt, play flat out to win — and trust you and me to stymie the expulsion threat."

"But how?" I said.

"I've been questioning Dick about Roger Buckley, Tim. It seems he not only fancies himself as the big landowner and big sporting man in this district. He also has a status symbol art collection. From the sound of him, he's as ignorant as a pig, artistically. He only knows money values. He's careful about those. He keeps his collection in a room with steel shutters on the windows and a reinforced door with a fancy lock. His chief boast, his pride, is a statuette by Benvenuto Cellini — the only one of Cellini's famous gold unicorns that's in private hands."

His grey eyes danced.

"If it were in *our* hands, Tim, we'd have a bargaining point in dealing with the Buckleys!"

"But it's not in our hands," I pointed out, looking narrowly at him. "It's in a reinforced room in Roger Buckley's house.'

The ex-Duke smiled. "I want you to take the car, Tim, and run up to London this afternoon. Go and see Basil Ivor."

I nodded. Basil Ivor was a Mayfair art dealer who, in our days at Derehurst Castle, had been the ducal adviser in matters concerning the castle art treasures. We had caught him out in a bit of brazen roguery. This had proved fortunate, for Prosper Fair's loss of Derehurst had occurred at about the same time, and subsequently we had found the dealer very ready to help in any little adventure which interested the ex-Duke. I myself, as the ex-Duke's business manager, had a close personal understanding with Basil Ivor.

I said now, "Yes? I'm to see Basil Ivor?"

"Tell him you want some letterheads printed in a hurry in the name of – of P. D. Lowe, Photographic Artist. Basil will give you a London accommodation address and telephone number you can safely use. Let off a letter not later than tomorrow to Roger Buckley, Fedden Beeches, Church Fedden."

"What do I say?"

"You say that you've been commissioned, by a fine arts magazine shortly to start publication, to photograph pieces in celebrated collections, and you hope he'll grant you permission to include his Cellini unicorn in the series." Prosper smiled. "Buckley's a show-off, Tim. He won't want to miss a chance of publicity for his collection. You ought to have a reply, giving his permission, by Tuesday morning."

"And if it comes all right?"

"Write back to him saying you'll be visiting country houses in this area during the week and you'll telephone him to arrange an appointment for the photographic session. As soon as you've got that letter off, return here – bringing Basil Ivor and plenty of photographic equipment, lamps and so on. Drop Ivor off at the pub in the next village to Church Fedden, tell him to stand by with the gear, and you come and report to me here. I shall expect you Tuesday evening. All right, Tim? On your way, then!"

I knew better, from experience, than to question his instructions, though they puzzled me. I glanced back as I went through the french windows of the Rectory dining-room. Standing on the lawn, the ex-Duke was taking a cigarette from his case and looking up meditatively at the Long Men of Fedden.

I was back at the Rectory on Tuesday in time to report to Prosper, before dinner, that everything – so far – was going exactly as he wished.

"Well done, Timmy," he said. "Ah, there goes the dinner gong!"

Dinner was a cheerful meal that evening. I learned that the father-and-son tournament for the Long Golfers trophy was well under way. The Chaplain and Dick had won their first two matches with comparative ease. So, too, had the Buckleys.

The summer weather remained perfect. There were many spectators on Long Men Hill next morning – among them, Prosper and myself. Naturally, we were in the gallery – mostly men from the air base – who were rooting for the Matchams.

Prosper warned me, "We mustn't be seen by the Buckleys, Tim."

Nevertheless, I did catch one

or two distant glimpses of the Buckley pair, going round with a large gallery of their cronies and sycophants. The father was a big, burly, bald man who hit a very long ball off the tees. The son was a suave-looking, handsome seventeen - year - old with a slight, superior smile — a beautifully easy swinger of a club.

I concentrated on our own pair. Judy was pulling her father's caddie-car for him. Dick, after his talk with Prosper Fair, seemed to be playing like a different boy. As for the Chaplain, he kept, as might have been expected, very steadily to the strait and narrow.

They made a good pair. They looked to me a certainty for the final, and so it proved. Inevitably, it was Chaplain Walter Matcham and his son Dick, and Roger Buckley and his son Edward, who got through to fight it out over thirty-six holes on the Friday.

At quarter-to-nine on Friday morning, acting on Prosper's instructions, I went to a telephone-box in the village and dialed the number of Buckley's big house, Fedden Beeches.

"Mr. Buckley's residence," a pompous, butler-like voice answered.

"Could I speak to Mr. Roger Buckley, please? My name is Lowe. I've been in correspondence with Mr. Buckley. He's expecting a call from me."

After a short wait, another voice came on the line — a voice that sounded as though it were talking through a mouthful of eggs-and-bacon. "Hallo? Are you Lowe? You take your time, don't you? I expected to hear from you sooner."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Buckley. I'm following a tight schedule here in the west country," I said. "Would three o'clock this afternoon be convenient time for me to photograph your collection?"

"I can't cope with you today, Lowe. I got a thirty-six hole golf match on. You'd better make it next week some time."

"I'm afraid that's not possible, Mr. Buckley. I have to deliver the material I've gathered this week to the magazine editor tonight. He'll then decide which collection to feature in the big *de luxe* first issue of the magazine. I know he was hoping to make a show with your Cellini unicorn — the only one in a private collection. But no matter, it can't be helped. Perhaps he'll be able to fit your collection in later on in the series. I'll explain the position to him."

"No, wait — don't ring off! Just a minute!" I heard a mutter of voices at the other end of the line, then Buckley's voice again: "You there, Lowe? Now, look — I can't be here myself this afternoon, but you come along about three and my butler'll

show you everything."

"That'll be fine, Mr. Buckley. I hope you'll have an enjoyable golf match!"

I hung up, chortling. It was working out just as Prosper had predicted. As I stepped out of the telephone-box, a stream of cars, many of them from the air base, was beginning to enter Church Fedden, bringing spectators for the final of the Long Golfers. I myself, in the sports car, drove the dozen miles to the neighbouring village where Basil Ivor had installed himself in a room at the inn. I retailed to him Prosper's instructions as to what he expected of us. The crooked art dealer, a tall man whose air of distinction was part of his stock-in-trade, looked sceptical.

"D'you think his ex-Grace really knows what he's doing, Tim?"

"Don't ask me," I said. "I'm just his business manager."

I had lunch with Basil Ivor at the inn. At half-past one, I telephoned the Rectory. Prosper himself answered the call; he had been expecting it.

"Everything all right, Tim?" he asked.

"So far," I said. "How's the match going?"

"Walter and Dick came into lunch two down on the first eighteen."

"Two *down*?"

"There are still eighteen holes to go, Tim. Anything can happen this afternoon. We must go ahead and set up our stymie. Carry out your instructions."

Roger Buckley's big house, Fedden Beeches, was on the opposite side of Long Men Hill from the golf course. About a mile from the house, Prosper had told me, was a rutted, grass-grown lane that led to a disused chalkpit. Driving the sports car, I found the chalkpit without difficulty. I pulled up in the shelter of its grass-grown white cliffs, looked at my watch. It was twenty past two. A few minutes later, I was joined by Basil Ivor, driving a hired car with a load of photographic impedimenta in the back. There was also a change of clothes for me.

The clothes, with the addition of one or two other touches, including a pair of heavily horn-rimmed glasses, transformed my appearance.

"How do I look?" I asked Basil Ivor.

"Like a freelance press photographer," he admitted grudgingly.

Thus reassured, I got into the hired car and, leaving Basil Ivor with the sports car in the chalkpit, drove to the Buckley house. It was almost exactly three o'clock when I pulled up before the steps to the imposing terrace. I walked across the terrace and gave the bellpull a tug. As I stood waiting, I heard a distant volley of handclapping

from the other side of the hill. I wondered anxiously who the clapping was for — Walter and Dick or the Buckley couple.

The door opened. I handed a visiting-card to the pompous-looking butler — undoubtedly the man I had spoken to on the telephone.

"Ah, yes," he said. "Mr. Lowe. I 'ave instructions about you. This way."

"I have a good deal of equipment in the car," I said.

He called a footman, who helped me carry my various cameras, leather cases, light-standards, screens and back-drops into the great hall. The butler was unlocking a door that from its appearance of weight as he pushed it open, must have been steel-lined. Reaching in, he switched on a light.

"In here, Mr. Lowe," he said.

I was impressed by Buckley's collection. There were some valuable-looking paintings on the wall of the lofty room. Over each painting was its own individual light. I saw at once the Cellini unicorn. A small but perfect work of the master goldsmith, it stood on a slender pedestal in the centre of the room. The butler was crossing to open the steel shutters of the tall windows.

I said, "Leave those, please. I shall be using my own lighting. If you'll just show me where your plugs are —"

He showed me, and I arranged my lamp-standards around the unicorn, plugged them in, and had the main lights in the room switched off. The unicorn shone golden on its pedestal in a flood of light from the standards. I crouched around, taking photographs from various angles — or what would have been photographs if there had been any film in the camera.

"Right," I said, at last. "Now, I want to get an angled shadow effect."

I unrolled a projection-screen behind the unicorn. The screen, on its single-legged metal stand, looked a bit precarious, as such screens do.

"Would you come and hold this steady for me, please?" I said. "Stand each side of it and just hold the edge."

The butler and footman did as I asked, and I unplugged all the lights except one. I arranged this carefully, adjusting it so that the shadow of the little golden unicorn was thrown up gallant and huge on the centre of the screen.

"Splendid," I said. "A most dramatic effect!"

Crouching, peering through the rangefinder of my camera, I backed a little, carefully catching my heel in the light-cable, jerking it from the plug.

"Damn!" I said. "Just a minute — don't move —"

I fumbled about for the cable.

In the pitch darkness, I could hear the breathing of the two men. On Prosper's instructions, I did not lay a finger on the statuette. Taking my time, cursing and muttering in the darkness, I got the cable plugged back in.

"Right," I said, as the light flashed back on. "Now, we can get on!"

I went through the motions of taking pictures.

"Good," I said. "That'll do, I think. Roll up the screen now, please, and put the room lights on. I've got some first-rate pictures. Tell Mr. Buckley he'll be receiving complimentary proofs from the magazine next week."

The footman helped me carry all my gear out to the car, and I drove off – back to the chalk-pit. I changed into my ordinary clothes and, leaving Basil Ivor there with the two cars, I took a footpath that led up over the side of the hill to the golf course.

I found Prosper waiting for me, as arranged, behind a great clump of gorse alongside the seventeenth fairway. A crowd of spectators ringed the green. They were perfectly silent. Evidently the players were putting.

Prosper lifted an inquiring eyebrow as I joined him.

"All well," I said – "though where it gets us, I don't pretend to know. How does the game stand?"

"It's anybody's game, Tim. Walter and Dick pulled back a hole at the twelfth. They were still one down off the seventeenth tee here, but Roger Buckley bunkered his drive. Unless Walter or Dick messes it up on the green, they ought to go to the last hole all square."

A hubbub of voices and clapping broke out as he spoke.

"Yes," he said, "Walter and Dick have taken the seventeenth. Look, it's the fellows in uniform who're clapping – the people from the air base. All square off the eighteenth tee! Anybody's game! Come on, Tim – if we keep well to the back of the gallery, as I've been doing, we can safely watch them play this last hole. Come on!"

The crowd was surging forward to ring the eighteenth tee.

"There's the Rector, Tim," Prosper murmured, as we joined the crowd. "The old man hasn't missed a stroke."

It was the first time I had seen the Rector of Church Fedden. He was a gaunt old white-eyebrowed man in charcoal tweeds and a pepper-and-salt cherical boater. He was craning eagerly to get a view of the tee.

On the tee, Judy was handing her father his driver. The Chaplain, trim, tanned, bareheaded, gave her a little smile as he took the club. He stooped to tee his ball.

The crowd on the tee was so still, now, that I could hear the

thin thrilling of larks in the sky and the remote drone of an aircraft making a circle of con trail high above the chalk-white silhouettes of the Long Men of Fedden on the hilltop.

Crack, went Walter Matcham's club-head – and the crowd, motionless, watched the ball arch far and straight, and roll to a standstill, a white dot on the turf, well over halfway up the fairway. A volley of handclapping broke out.

"Tie that, young Buckley," I heard the ex-Duke mutter.

Edward Buckley did more than tie it. He was a fine golfer, no denying that. He outdrove the Chaplain's ball by a good forty yards, and both balls were dead in the middle of the fairway. Roger Buckley's sycophants and cronies were noisily jubilant as the whole crowd surged forward up the fairway.

I caught another glimpse of Judy. She was walking beside her father, and was pulling his caddie-car. Her dark, pretty hair was bright in the sunshine. She looked pale and proud, and her brown eyes shone with excitement. Dick walked on her other side.

It was his shot, now. Again silence fell. The tall boy studied the lie of his ball. He studied the distance to the green. He half drew an iron club from his bag, changed his mind, took out his spoon. His face was as white as the chalk silhouettes of the prehistoric men on the slope above us.

Prosper whispered to me, "This is his last chance to throw the game away, Tim, and he knows it. If he'd only trust us! If I could just catch his eye –"

But I saw Dick glance uneasily at young Buckley; and I saw the challenge, the mockery, the warning in young Buckley's thin smile. Dick's glance roved on quickly, searchingly, round the crowd – and he spotted us, standing at the back. Prosper nodded, and raised a hand quickly, the thumb up.

Dick took a practice half-swing with his club, then stepped up to his ball and played his shot with the smooth, easy action of the natural-born golfer he was. The ball arched high, bounced just short of the edge of the green, bounced twice on the green, rolled to a standstill two feet beyond the pin.

"Perfect," Prosper muttered, through the stir and applause. "Look at the Buckleys, Tim."

Young Buckley's expression looked taut and vindictive. Buckley Senior was flushed with rage, and it was that rage that undid him. He took it out on the ball, hit it too hard. It bounced on the green, scuttled up the bank at the back, flashed over the top and vanished from view.

I felt Prosper's grip on my arm. "Bunkered, Timmy!" he

said. "Our stymie's going to be needed —"

We surged forward with the crowd, to see Edward Buckley recover brilliantly from the bunker his father had put him in. But Walter Matcham made no mistake with his putt. Judy was holding the pin. The ball dropped unerringly into the cup and, as a tremendous cheer went up from the air base people and the Rector's clerical boater sailed high into the sunshine, I saw Judy drop the flag and throw her arms around her brother and father and kiss them ecstatically.

But Prosper said, "Look at the Buckleys, Tim!"

Roger and Edward Buckley, without a word, strode off the green and headed for the clubhouse.

"They're as angry as hornets," Prosper said. "They'll be on the telephone to the Major soon, telling him to go to the headmaster and get young Dick expelled — unless our stymie works. Come on, Tim!"

We took the footpath that led up over the shoulder of the hill to the chalkpit where Basil Ivor was waiting with the two cars.

"Good man, Basil," said the ex-Duke. He opened the luggage compartment of the sports car, took out a white trenchcoat and hard felt hat, put them on, then turned to me. "Now, then, Tim," he said, "I'm sorry about this, but it's necessary." He tore my tie loose, scruffed my hair all over my head, gave me a sharp blow on the nose. "All right?" he asked.

"What the hell?" I said, bewildered. I clapped my handkerchief to my face, "You've made my nose bleed!"

"Good," he said. "Rub the blood over your face and keep your handkerchief to it. Come on, now — both of you!"

He got into the sports car, Basil and I crammed in with him, and he drove straight to the Buckleys' house. We walked up the steps and Prosper plucked the bellpull. His expression was grim as the portly butler opened the door.

"I am Inspector Purdy, Fine Arts Section, Scotland Yard," said the ex-Duke. "Here is my card. Is your master in?"

"No, sir," said the butler, staring. "'E's expected shortly, but —"

"We'll wait," Prosper said curtly. He cupped a hand under my elbow. "Come, Mr. Lowe." He turned to the butler. "This gentleman is Mr. Lowe, the photographic artist who had an appointment to do some work in this house this afternoon. On his way here, his car was held up in a quiet road. He was attacked and left gagged and bound in a ditch. His car and photographic equipment were

stolen from him. I have reason to believe he was impersonated. Have *you* admitted anybody to this house who looked anything like this gentleman?"

"Not—not *much* like him, sir," stammered the butler, looking at me askance. "But I admitted a man 'oo claimed 'e was Mr. Lowe, sir — yes, sir."

"That's just too bad," Prosper said. "Now, show us where Mr. Lowe can rest and recover a little while we wait for your master."

Scarcely had the butler shown us into the drawing-room than we heard Roger Buckley's big car come purring up the drive. Prosper winked at Basil Ivor and myself. We heard the butler gabbling in the hall. Abruptly, the door was flung open and Roger Buckley, already smarting from defeat on the golf course and now further incensed by news of more trouble, strode in angrily.

"What the hell's all this nonsense?" he shouted.

"I see you have my card in your hand, sir," Prosper said. "This gentleman with the bloodied face is Mr. Lowe, the photographer. This other gentleman —" he indicated Basil Ivor — "is expert adviser to the Fine Arts Section, Scotland Yard. He is Dr. Torpenhow, the authority on the works of Benvenuto Cellini."

The colour ebbed suddenly from Roger Buckley's florid face. He turned and strode from the room. We followed. He was shouting to the butler for the keys to the art room. Unlocking the massive door, he switched on the light. He saw the Cellini unicorn on its pedestal, and expelled an audible breath of relief.

"Safe!" he exclaimed. He turned to us. "For a moment, I feared —"

"I know very well what you feared, Mr. Buckley," Prosper said, "and I only wish I could reassure you." He turned to the gaping butler. "Now, about the bogus 'Mr. Lowe' whom you admitted this afternoon. You allowed him into this room — with photographic equipment?"

"Why — why, yes, sir. I 'ad instructions —"

"I see. Now, tell me — was there *darkness* at any time while the bogus 'Mr. Lowe' was in this room?"

"Why, yes, sir. 'E — 'e tripped over one of 'is light cables an' the plug got jerked out. It was dark for a minute or so, but me an' the footman was standing by all the time an' —"

"In point of fact," Prosper said sternly, "if the room was in pitch darkness, it would have been impossible for you and the footman to see him take out the Cellini replica he had brought in one of his leather cases, place the replica there upon the

pedestal, and put the genuine Cellini *into* the leather case. Isn't that so?"

The butler's eyes seemed suddenly to start from his head. Roger Buckley made an explosive sound.

"Why, you blithering, dunderheaded idiot!" he bawled. "You —"

"Steady, sir," Prosper said. "This man can't be blamed. He had to deal with a very clever scoundrel. We think we know the man's identity. We had a tip that he was after your Cellini statuette. I came down here this afternoon with our adviser, Dr. Torpenhow, in the hope of forestalling our man. Unfortunately, when Mr. Lowe here — who's been brutally manhandled, as you can see — managed to attract our attention from the ditch where he had been thrown, bound and gagged, we knew we had arrived too late."

He turned to Basil Ivor, who was examining the golden unicorn closely through a magnifying glass.

"What do you make of it, Dr. Torpenhow?" Prosper asked.

Basil Ivor pursed his lips. "It looks very much like the work of the man we suspect," he said. "It's so brilliantly clever a replica that I don't think anyone else could have produced it. To be certain it's his work, of course, not that of some other counterfeiter, I should need to have it in my studio for microscopic examination, if Mr. Buckley is agreeable to that."

"I advise it, Mr. Buckley," Prosper said earnestly. "To establish definitely that this counterfeit is the work of the man we suspect would greatly facilitate our laying him by the heels before he has time to dispose of your Cellini. I could give you a receipt for this — this —"

He gestured contemptuously toward the unicorn.

"Take it!" Buckley yelled. He was beside himself with rage. "Get the damned thing out of my house! I want no bogus junk here! I want my genuine Cellini back or I'll know the reason why! Get that thing out of my house!"

"Very good, sir," Prosper said soothingly.

Basil Ivor lifted the unicorn, seemingly of considerable weight despite its diminutive size, from the pedestal. It was the first time the unicorn had been touched by any of us. He placed it carefully in the leather case he had brought for the purpose.

Prosper said: "We shall do our utmost, Mr. Buckley, you may rely on that. I shall hope to have some news for you shortly."

We then left the deluded man and drove off with, at his own invitation — in fact, his peremptory command — his genuine Cellini.

We dropped Basil Ivor off at the chalkpit, where Prosper instructed him to return to London in the hired car, taking the Cellini with him to hold in safe custody pending further instructions.

"Now, Tim, a telephone call to Buckley," Prosper said.

He drove the sports car into Church Fedden village, pulled up at the public call-box, told me to wait. He was not long in the box. When he came out and got back behind the wheel of the car, he was smiling.

"Very satisfactory, Tim," he said. "We'll get back to the Rectory now. I think dinner there tonight should be quite a gala affair."

"What did you say to Buckley?" I asked, intensely curious.

"I simply told him that if he wants his Cellini back, doesn't want to be made a laughing-stock over the way it was stolen from him, and doesn't want the whole county made aware of the dirty bit of blackmail he and his son attempted on a fifteen-year-old boy, a guest in this country, to win a game of golf, he'd better forget all about telephoning the Galloping Major, and keep his mouth shut about the entire business. Then his Cellini will be returned to him on the day after young Dick Matcham completes his exchange scholarship year at the school."

"I see," I said slowly. "What did Buckley say?"

Prosper chuckled. "I wouldn't like to repeat it, Tim. He sounded as if he was having a stroke. He's stymied, and he knows it — and he wants his Cellini back." In his casual way, he added: "Fix it up with Basil Ivor to pack and return the thing to Buckley when the time comes, Tim. And now let's forget the whole unsavoury business. All right?"

"Certainly," I said.

Privately, however, I resolved to have Basil Ivor put some expert faker to work preparing a counterfeit of the unicorn. The chances were, I felt, Buckley would never know the difference. and Ivor would be able to get us a good price for an undercover sale of the genuine Cellini. Prosper seemed not to realise that we no longer had the Derehurst Castle rent-roll behind us. We had to live. And I was, after all, his business manager —

"Ah, there's Judy," he said, as our sports car hummed up the Rectory drive.

The Chaplain's daughter waved to us gaily from the steps. She looked radiant.

I glanced up at the hill. The con trail of an aircraft from the base lingered high in the evening sky above the strange, chalk-white, prehistoric silhouettes, so shortly to be in the care of the National Trust—the Long Men of Fedden.

tea ceremony

by Robert Andrea

YOSHIKO INAGAKI took the pot of boiling water off the stove and poured some of it into a china pot sitting on the kitchen table. She put loose tea into the pot, let it simmer for a while, then carried the pot into the living room. Gracefully, she knelt to her knees and placed the pot on a coffee table. "The tea is ready, father," she announced to the straight-backed, slim man seated on the other side of the table.

The man grunted acknowledgment and waited for his daughter to pour the tea. When she had done so, he took the cup in his hand and said, "You must obey my wishes, daughter. You will not marry the American."

"But father," the girl cried, "I love him."

"Do not dare to challenge my word," the father said with glaring eyes and a stern voice. "You will not marry him. That is final. I will hear no more."

"Yes, father," the girl said, lowering her eyes. She watched her father, seated cross-legged across from her, sip his tea.

Suddenly he put the cup down

Robert Andrea, who recently served in Viet-Nam, has lived and worked in Japan and knows that country better—and much more intimately—than any American writer on Today's Japan. This must have been evident in his recent SMUDGES OF DEATH (May 1963, SMM) and now in this pastiche of a death—a very respectful death. . . . *H.S.S.*

and said, "It is too strong. Take the pot back to the kitchen and put more water in it."

Quietly, Yoshiko picked up the tea pot, rose, and walked in quick, short strides to the kitchen. If only her mother were alive, she was thinking. Her mother had been much more modern and understanding and kind than her old-fashioned, authoritarian father who was still trying to live in the old Japan. He didn't love her at all, she knew. He didn't want her to marry the American because he hated all Americans and because he wanted his will to be respected and wished to keep her to be a slave and servant to him. He had killed her mother with his uncompromising ways — making her cater to him when she was deathly ill — and sooner or later he would do the same to Yoshiko.

If only she could disobey him and marry the American without his approval . . . but she could not disobey him.

In the kitchen, she put the additional water into the pot, then added the poison she had purchased. She had purposely made the tea strong, knowing that her father liked it weak. If he had changed his mind and allowed her to go through with the marriage, she would have returned to the kitchen and added merely water.

But he had said no again.

So she was forced to add the poison as well. She was sorry to be doing what she was *doing*, but she could see no other honorable solution. She know it would hurt Donald, her fiance, most of all. But he was young, and she felt he would forget her in time and find someone else. She loved him very much, and if she could not have him, nothing meant anything to her any more.

She brought the pot of tea back into the living room and put it down on the table. "I've made it weaker," she said to her father, who looked up at her with hard, thin brown eyes.

She poured the tea into his cup, then into her own cup.

She waited until her father drank, then picked up her own cup and quickly swallowed the poisoned tea.

She could not disobey her father, but neither would she obey him . . . .

a question of character

by Victor Canning

THE REAL reason why Geoffrey decided to murder his wife was not just that he wished to marry another woman with whom he had fallen in love. No, that may be the kind of motive which forces a man to the point of thinking about murder. But to take him over the edge into action it needs more than that. Plenty of men would like to murder their wives—and the other way round, I suppose. But that's so far as it gets. No, the thing which determined Gilroy was his vanity.

The thing happened at a cocktail party when he was introduced to a woman who said brightly, "Oh, yes, you must be Martha Gilroy's husband. I do think her books are marvellous, don't you? Tell me, what is it like having a novelist for a wife?"

He didn't tell her, he just saw red, gulped his martini and got out of the room as fast as he could. He walked all the way back to Sloane Street with his mind in a murderous fog. Martha Gilroy's husband. The best-selling novelist. He'd married Martha ten years before,

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Victor Canning, author of the recent BLACK FLAMINGO (Sloane, $3.95), reviewed elsewhere in this issue, and of other novels such as THE MAN FROM THE TURKISH SLAVE, THE GOLDEN SALAMANDER, etc. etc., has been called "one of the two top men in adventure novels" (Dorothy B. Hughes, Los Angeles Mirror*). This is the first publication of this story in the United States.*

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when she had been a private secretary to an industrial consultant. Not a good secretary, either. Married her when already he was Geoffrey Gilroy, best-selling writer of thrillers and detective novels. Although he still turned out his one book a year, was still a good seller, her name had eclipsed his. He was just Martha Gilroy's husband. He went up to their flat and fixed himself a large whisky. Martha was out, and to ease his feelings he picked up a copy of her latest book—*The Hydra-Headed Answer*—and slammed it against the far wall.

He sat down with the whisky decanter and the siphon close to hand and forced himself to consider the situation.

Ten years. He'd married Martha when she was twenty; a quiet, dark-haired, pleasant girl with little personality. She was good about the flat, she was in love with him and she was dominated by him. At first she typed his manuscripts. She took an interest in his work, which he encouraged. As a writer he knew his own weaknesses. There was no one who could touch him at devising plots, no one who could so defly twist the sequences of actions to achieve devastating surprise . . . but he was bad at characters. Fundamentally, he wasn't interested in what made people do things. He was only interested in what they did, and how they did it.

Thinking it over now, he couldn't remember how Martha had gradually come to take a bigger part in his work. But they had soon reached a point when it was normal practice for him to discuss his plots and characters with her while he was in the process of planning a book. And she came up with good ideas. Made suggestions that brought his people to life. He was grateful to her, but he didn't show it too much.

And then, without telling him, she had written a book of her own. He knew nothing of it until the proof copies arrived at the flat. *The Broken Link* by Martha Gilroy. He thought the title was poor, uncompelling, and he thought she might have used her maiden name and not traded on his, but he said nothing and was even a little sorry for her when the book faded to a quiet death two weeks after its publication. But her second book went away with a bang. The serial rights were sold in America and England. Hollywood bought the film rights for twenty thousand dollars and within a month it had sold eighty thousand copies. It had taken him ten years to reach that figure with his own books. Her third book had been an explosion!

He helped himself to more whisky. He was going to mur-

der her. There was no doubt of that. In a way it was ironical because he could see that he himself had created her, watched her first steps in all those things in which she had eventually outshone him . . . things which he had suffered in silence because, whatever else he might be, he was not ill-mannered. He'd taught her to play bridge and now she could leave him standing. Whatever she tried to do it seemed she could do with an effortless ease. They had a little cottage in Kent and, as a bachelor, he had enjoyed working in the garden, been in fact quite a competent gardener and knowledgeable about rock plants and roses. When he first took her there as his wife, Martha hadn't known a viburnum from a lilac. Within a year she knew more about gardening than he did, and was taking prizes at the local flower show . . . What a woman, what a damnable woman. He tossed his whisky back and glowered at her book lying by the skirting.

He'd almost reached the murder point over golf. There was a golf course not far from the cottage and at the week-ends he played around with a men's four, happily slicing and shanking to a handicap of eighteen. Martha had taken lessons from the pro and within two years could beat him level. He gave up golf.

And now, while his sales were slipping, her damned *Hydra-Headed Answer* was everywhere, and he was being referred to as Martha Gilroy's husband. And he was in love with another woman, Evelyn Marks. Martha knew about that, though they had only once discussed it. She wouldn't divorce him because she loved him still and felt that eventually he would come back to her. They went on living together, but not as man and wife, and she was content to wait for him, confident that he would come back. That had been two years ago.

He got up and went into his bedroom and began to pack a bag. Well, this was the end. He was going to get rid of Martha Gilroy. But it had to be thought out. No mistakes.

He left a note for her to say that he was going down to Kent to work out the plot of his next murder mystery. So he was.

The drive, going easily, took about an hour and a half. On the way he calmed down, but his resolution to get rid of Martha was unshaken. For once he was planning a murder—not for the benefit of his sales and his readers—but for himself. And it had to be good. It had to be foolproof. One thing was certain, Evelyn must know nothing about it. She lived in Kent, about twenty miles from the cottage.

For the next two days he kept

to the cottage, thinking about Martha, thinking . . . He went over in his mind all her habits, all her mannerisms, all the customary movements she had when she was at the cottage—for he had decided that the murder must take place here. Here, where she kept her golf clubs, where he had dealt her her first hand of bridge, and where she had first started gardening. It took him three days to get it all worked out. And when it was worked out he examined his plan and tried to fault it. He couldn't.

He would have liked to have put the plan into operation at once. But Martha was busy finishing a book and wouldn't be at the cottage for a month yet. In July, though, there was the village Flower Show and always they came down to the cottage a week before and stayed over for the Show. Meanwhile, he arranged to give a lecture in Watford on the day they would be coming down to the cottage. That made it easy. Martha would come down on her own in the afternoon. He would send a telegram saying he had been delayed in town after the lecture and would be down the next morning. By midnight Martha would be dead.

He stayed on at the cottage for another two days and most of that time he spent in the cellar. The cellar was full of junk furniture, a great pile of winter logs, packing-cases and straw bottle covers from the little store of whisky which he kept there. The whisky would have to be sacrificed.

On one wall of the cellar was a forty-eight hour clock. It hung about five feet from the ground and had two heavy lead weights on chains that regulated the pendulum. The weights and the pendulum swung free of the clock. Over the two days he carefully checked the movements of the weights to determine how long ahead he would have to start the clock in order for the falling weight to reach a height of two feet from the ground. When he had determined this, he substituted for the weight a plastic bottle which had contained hand lotion and which he filled with petrol. He had a little trouble adjusting the amount of petrol in the bottle to the exact weight. There was an electric point in the cellar into which they occasionally plugged an electric fire to dry out the place. He put the fire, which had two unguarded bars, under the weighted bottle.

It would take, he discovered, fourteen hours for the weight to fall from its top position to be within a couple of inches of the electric fire bars when the fire was raised on a packing-case. Once the plastic bottle was within an inch or so of the fire

it would melt and the petrol would cascade on to the elements. He didn't leave this to chance. He carried out the full experiment with petrol, standing by with a bucket of water. The bottle didn't melt and release the petrol, he discovered, until it was actually touching the two elements. And it took him a few anxious moments to get the flames under control. The electric fire was ruined. He threw it away going back to London. There was another fire in the house he could use. He also bought another bottle of the hand lotion and emptied it.

All he would have to do was to set the clock going at ten o'clock on the morning of the day Martha was due at the cottage. She never went down to the cellar. But he would lock it to make sure. At midnight the fire would start. And she would sleep through the conflagration. He would make sure of that. The burning cottage would collapse on top of the cellar and there would be no trace found of clock or electric fire. Ten o'clock. That would give him time to motor easily to Watford for his afternoon lecture.

On his way back to London he called on Evelyn and had coffee with her. At least with Evelyn he knew there would be no recurrence of the trouble he'd had with Martha. She was the widow of a naval officer, a tall, slim blonde with very little brain. But gay and good company. Already they had spent holidays together and not once, refreshingly, had he ever seen her reading a book. *Vogue* and *The Tatler* were her only literary interests.

Living with Martha from then on was not easy. The best course he found was to spend as little time as possible with her. He used his club more than he had done and, whenever he felt that they might be alone in the evenings, he invited people in; and he kept counting the days to July and the week before the Flower Show. In the meantime he saw his doctor and complained of insomnia. He grumbled that the first prescription did nothing for him and got the doctor to write a stronger one. But for three weeks he took none of the sleeping tablets.

When the day came, there was no hitch. He left the flat at half-past eight, telling Martha that he was going to spend the morning at the London Library. He drove down to the cottage, which stood on the edge of a wood out of sight of other houses. He parked his car on the far side of the wood and walked through it to the back of the cottage. He went up into the bathroom and took down a bottle of health salts from the cabinet. Martha was a neat, or-

derly person. Her bathroom at the flat was duplicated here to save her carrying unnecessary things to and fro. Every night before going to bed she took a glass of health salts. He crushed up his sleeping tables into a fine powder and tipped this into the bottle, mixing it slightly with the surface layer of salts. In the effervescense Martha would notice nothing. He had no fears that she would not take her dose. He had never known her to miss a night.

At five minutes to ten he was in the cellar and set the clock going with the petrol-filled fixed up the electric fire on its packing-case at the foot of the wall below the bottle and piled around it straw bottle cases and junk that would burn easily. The cottage itself was mostly wood and had a reed thatch. It would go up like a torch. He switched on the fire, watched the lazy swing of the pendulum for a moment or two, and then went out, locking the cellar door. Martha Gilroy's husband . . . the husband who had taught her what a split infinitive was, taught her the difference between a primula and a polyanthus, taught her her first bridge convention, taught her . . . He went out and tucked the door key under the white stone by the rockery.

He was in Watford by one and had a drink and some sandwiches in a pub. At half-past two he gave his lecture. At six o'clock he was back in London and went straight to his club. He had dinner and then went to a theatre with a club friend. After this, he sent a telegram which, since the cottage wasn't on the telephone, he knew wouldn't be delivered until the morning post, explaining that he was staying in London the night and coming down in the morning.

At eleven o'clock he went back to the flat for the night — and got the surprise of his life.

Martha was in bed with the light on, reading.

Gilroy stood in the doorway staring at her in amazement.

"What the devil are you doing here?"

She put her book down slowly and looked at him.

"Why aren't you at the cottage?" she asked.

"I had dinner at the club and felt too damned tired to make the drive. I sent a telegram to you there. Why aren't you there?"

Martha lit a cigarette slowly before she replied. She looked tired and when she answered there was a spiritlessness in her voice.

"Because I'm never going there again, Geoffrey. Never. And tomorrow I'm moving out of here. You can have your divorce."

"What is this?"

For a moment she managed a smile. "You don't understand? No, perhaps not. But then you were never very good at character, were you? For years I've thought that this thing between you and Evelyn wouldn't last. That you'd come back. I've clung to that. But I was wrong. In this last month I've seen it so plainly. You've gone right away from me. So far that you can never come back. I can't fight the inevitable. So I give up. You're free."

Gilroy stood there, saying nothing. In his imagination he could see the pendulum swinging and the lead weight now so far down the wall. Damn the woman, why couldn't she have come out with this before? Even when she did something for him she had to spoil it. He was fond of the cottage and now it would burn to no purpose.

"Aren't you going to say anything?" she asked.

"What can I say? Thank you?"

"I suppose not . . ." She picked up her book and went on, "It's a pity you haven't gone down to the cottage. I made a big gesture for you . . . You might almost call it my last love gift."

"What do you mean it's a pity I didn't go down?"

"I took the liberty of sending a telegram to Evelyn. I signed is as though from you, saying that I'd agreed to give you a divorce and asking her to come over to the cottage to stay. If I know her, she'll be sitting up in bed waiting for you."

For a moment Gilroy stared at her, his face a mask of anguish.

"No! It can't be!" he cried.

"But it is. She's waiting for you — probably asleep. Geoffrey what—?"

But Gilroy wasn't there. He had turned and rushed from the bedroom.

He didn't take the lift. It was quicker to go down the steps at this time of night. His car was parked in the street outside. He was in it and driving hard south towards the river within half a minute. It was gone eleven. The petrol bomb would go off at twelve, maybe a few minutes before. And God! Oh God! Evelyn, he remembered, sometimes took health salts. They were slimming and she always fussed about her figure.

An hour and a half driving normally. An hour, at this time of night, if he stepped on it and wasn't held up. He had an hour of hell ahead of him. Evelyn would be there he knew that. This was what she had always wanted. His divorce. She had stayed at the cottage with him before. Knew all about the key under the stone. He dared not telephone the fire brigade. There was nothing he could do that

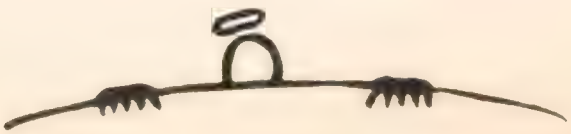
would save Evelyn and keep him safe except get there before the worst could happen.

As he came round the corner of the wood road, he saw the flames, licking up on the outside of one wall towards the thatch roof. He roared by two or three men who were running up the road and he stopped and leaped from the car. He sprinted up to the door and flung it open. A great wall of flame and smoke surged outwards, sweeping across the hall. He put his hands over his face and ran through it to the stairs. On the cellar side they were alight. He went up feeling the terrible heat biting at his hands and face. For a moment there was fresh air at the top of the stairs. He sobbed with the relief of being able to breathe, and then flung open the door of the bedroom. The whole window side of the room was blazing with flames and he could see them spurting and twisting across the room towards the bed. Already some of the hangings on the four-poster were showing little tongues of flame. The framework of the window was burnt away and the glass gone. The draught drove in, fanning the flames.

She was lying half uncovered, her arms and shoulders bare, her blonde head pillowed on one hand.

"Evelyn!"

He ran to her and shook her. Her head fell back and he heard her breath, thick and drugged. He wrapped the bed cover about her head and shoulders, gathered it round her, and lifted her. The window and its wall was a great sweep of flame and the air was full of the sound of wood and thatch as it crackled and spat. Through the open door a great roll of smoke and flame barred his way. He lowered his head and rushed towards the window, shouting, screaming. As he reached it he raised her and saw for a moment the flame-lit figures of men below. He leaned forward and flung her from him, saw her falling . . . and then he staggered back as the flames beat into his face and eyes. He collapsed to the floor and as he fell the ceiling above him came down in a great spread of roaring, grinding fire, bringing to an end the last work of Geoffrey Gilroy.



a case for the rabbi

by Philip Perlmutter

THE TOWN of Shalomski, in southeastern Russia, had no prison, judge, police station or constable. For one thing, the town was too poor. Secondly, even if funds were available for such modern institutions, it would be a waste of money, because no Shalomskite committed a crime, at least not to anyone's recollection. It might be further safely said that if a villager wanted to steal and run off with something of value, he couldn't.

The Tzar had made it very clear that no one could leave the village without a passport from the district authorities—and they were in Hobin, fifty miles away. That meant that no villager could venture out on the road to see the authorities, for if they were caught, they would be arrested for travelling without a passport. So no one left the village—and no one entered, except the tax collectors, and that was once a year.

Such was part of the lot of the 19th century peasant Jew in Russia.

You could imagine the surprise and joy then when one Friday morning a black carri-

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Philip Perlmutter is concerned professionally with the very real problems faced, in our society-in-transition, by the many whom it seems so easy to dismiss (or "type") as unassimilable, or "foreign" to our ways. This is of course not justified, as anyone who knows the story of the founding of this country will agree. It is also a denial of those principles for which we, as Americans, stand. H.S.S.

age with two horses joggled into the village. Inside was a tall, red-checked man, with a large beaver hat and mirror-polished cane. Almost as well fed and clothed was his man-servant alongside. To make things even more impressive, Mr. Gelten and his servant, Misha, were found to be Jewish, possessing the almost unheard of passports to travel freely throughout the country. At first, the villagers thought them to be from the House of Rothschild. That the two men were found to be of lesser wealth didn't diminish the awe of the villagers.

The carriage had cracked an axle and needed repairing, a one or two-hour job at most, the travellers thought. But Shima the Blacksmith — much to the surprise of his neighbors — said it would take a day and a half at least. Actually the carriage could have been fixed much earlier, but Shima, as sexton of the synagogue, wanted Mr. Gelten to attend evening services. For surely, if Mr. Gelten were as wealthy as he appeared, he would make a generous and much needed contribution to the upkeep of the synagogue.

But no sooner did Shima's hopes kindle than shame blanketed him and the villagers. Where could they put such a rich man for the night? There was no hotel, no inn, not even a two-story dwelling. And what would he eat? A man with a servant — and such a well-fed one — would surely want caviar, fancy silverware and finger-bowls.

Better the travellers should drive off than shame the village for its poverty, thought the villagers. But a solution was found in Hannah the Gabber, a spinster who lived all alone in a little shack at the end of Gedillah Street. It was agreed to have the visitors stay there for the evening, while Hannah moved into Hymela the Tailor's house.

And so down Godillah Street reluctantly strode Mr. Gelten, his cane proudly cutting the air, while Misha followed at his heels, carrying two large valises. Shima the Blacksmith and a half dozen other villagers followed at a respectful distance. The village children on the sides of the road waved jubilantly as if the Tzar's troops were passing in review.

No sooner did Mr. Gelten begin changing into fresh clothes than he shouted, "Thieves! Thieves! My wallet has been stolen!" And out he rushed into the street with Misha frantically parroting, "Thieves! Thieves! Someone has stolen my master's wallet!"

An army of drunken Cossacks couldn't have upset the Shalomskites more, nor could a bolt of lightning flashed the news faster. "Police! Police! Where are

the police?" Mr. Gelten stormed.

"Yes, where were the police? Never before did the Shalomskites feel so ashamed of themselves. "A rich man finally visits our town and is robbed, and there is no police." A most ridiculous situation — at least if there was one policeman — if only to protect rich men!

"But there is no police here," stammered Shima.

"No police?" Mr. Gelten's face flushed. "What do you mean, no police? Every town has police!"

It took great courage for Shima to reply. "I know, but not this one."

Disgusted, Mr. Gelten turned to the crowd, and waving his cane shouted, "Someone here stole my money, five hundred rubles!"

If it were in man's power to cause an eclipse that was the moment. And while the sun didn't change color, the faces of the villagers grew dark with disbelief and horror.

"Yes!" bellowed Mr. Gelten. "Someone here stole my money and I insist on being taken to the police, and right now!" His cane pounded the ground.

"Please, please, Mr. Gelten, relax," pleaded Shima.

"Relax? puffed Mr. Gelten, accenting each word with a nod of his head. "Relax, huh? Just like that? A man is robbed of 500 rubles and you say *'relax.'* Well, when *you* are robbed of 500 rubles *you* can relax. I'll not! I want the police!"

Shima and the rest realized there was much wisdom in the man's words. After all, for 500 rubles a man would have to work five years and then not spend a cent of it. Even then, it would be easier to amass 500 rubles than to find a policeman.

"Well, what are you standing like golems for — where's the police?"

Shima nodded sullenly, at a complete loss for words. "Rabbi Halick lives down the street . . ."

"A rabbi? I don't want a rabbi! I want a policeman!"

Shima smiled gently, as his courage returned with the remembrance of the town's only rabbi. "Oh, it is true that Rabbi Halick is no policeman, but he knows a great deal. He knows that no one in the village would steal your money."

"Fool, don't you see that someone *did* steal my money?"

"Rabbi Halick will know that, too."

And off they marched towards the rabbi's home, with Mr. Gelten promising a reward to anyone who exposed the thieves.

There was a twinkle in Rabbi Halick's eyes, which led people who didn't know him to believe that he was a lighthearted man. But to those who knew better, the twinkle was caused by the warmth of inner contentment

and of the joy that the awareness of God and the limitations of man brought.

The rabbi had just finished eating and was resting when Mr. Gelten, Misha, Shima and a handful of villagers crowded into the room.

"I've been robbed," Mr. Gelten shouted. "My wallet with 500 rubles is gone!"

"It happens sometimes," said the rabbi calmly. "Tell me, from what town are you?"

Mr. Gelten blinked in disbelief. The rabbi was either deaf or crazy. "Didn't you hear — I was robbed of 500 rubles! Do you know what 500 rubles are?"

The rabbi was unimpressed. "Would you like a glass of tea with sugar?"

Mr. Gelten turned angrily and pointed his cane menacingly at Shima. "Why did you say I should come here? I want the police and not an old rabbi who is obviously deaf."

The rabbi took another sip of tea. "I would like to help you, but some times things happen here over which man has no control. I don't know if such is not the case now." His quietly spoken and pregnant words fell like bombshells on Mr. Gelten and the rest of the villagers.

Now they eyed the rich man with suspicion, for surely the rabbi implied some thing supernatural about the missing 500 rubles.

Mr. Gelten impatiently tapped his cane on the wooden floor. "What do you mean by things happening over which man has no control? Do you think a ghost stole my money?" Contempt dripped from his lips.

The rabbi gazed stoically at him. "If someone in this village has stolen your money, it will be returned. But if no one stole it, who knows? We shall shortly know. But meanwhile why not sit down — in fact, all of you sit down, and we will have some tea. Soon it will be sundown and we will go to the synagogue to usher in the coming of the Sabbath."

Mr. Gelten was obstinate. He had been robbed. His carriage was broken. He was in a strange town. In miserable quarters. And now an old impossible rabbi was wasting his time and offering him a glass of ersatz tea. "I'm going for the police — and I'll tell them about you!" He pointed a crooked, accusing finger at the rabbi.

"Tell me, if your wallet is found, what will you do?"

"What do you mean *found*? It was stolen?"

"But if it were lost and now found?"

"In that unlikely case I would reward the locater."

"With what, may I ask?"

"With some rubles, of course."

Rabbi Halick stood up, his body erect, commanding; yet his

voice was humble, and the twinkle in his eyes brightened. "Tell me, what if God locates the money for you?"

For a moment the villagers thought Mr. Gelten was going to explode, so red and blown-up was his face. "This is nonsense," said Mr. Gelten, "nonsense. I'm going for the police." But before he could open the door, there was a great to-do outside.

Max the Widower, with four children, had found the wallet, and as soon as he showed it to the people in the rabbi's home, Mr. Gelten grabbed it and quickly counted the money.

But there was only 400 rubles.

"Where, scoundrel, is the other 100 rubles?" demanded Mr. Gelten.

The Widower blinked helplessly.

Mr. Gelten gripped him by the collar and shook him. "Where is the rest of the money?"

"I do not know. The wallet is as I found it. And as soon as I found it, I rushed here. I didn't even look inside, for I knew no one in town could have such a beautiful leather wallet. Why, I didn't even know until outside the door that there was a reward!"

Mr. Gelten laughed victoriously. "Reward, huh? You'll get no reward. *You* are the thief! You probably knew that I would find you out and so you thought rather than be caught and have no money, you would return it and think me stupid enough to give you some of it as a reward. You are too smart for yourself —but I see right through you! Thief!"

"I – I a thief?" Max the Widower stepped back, gripping his forehead as if struck by a hammer. Desperately he turned to his fellow villagers for support. "Tell him who I am. I am a poor man. The poorest and most unfortunate in the village. I have four children. I work very hard. Everyone know that. Why, my children do not have enough to eat. Oh, though God knows I could use your rubles, I would not steal them. I would not know how to steal."

"Poverty teaches how to steal – and also how to lie!"

"Enough!" interrupted Rabbi Halick. He stepped between the two men. "Give me the wallet!" he commanded, with all the strength of a Captain of a Cossack troop.

Mr. Gelten, surprised and awed, complied.

The rabbi examined the wallet, turning it over and over, as if searching for some tell-tale mark. Sitting down, he placed the wallet in his lap and took a sip of tea. "Tell me, Mr. Gelten, in front of all these people, how much money did your wallet have?"

"Five hundred rubles – I

can swear to it. Here, look!" and he pulled out a small notebook, on which various entries were made. "I have kept a complete record of all my expenditures from the time I left Moscow. As you can see, there is a balance of 500 rubles."

"Could you have made a mistake?"

"A mistake? I never make a mistake."

"Anr you yourself have counted the rubles in this wallet?"

"Yes, and there is only 400 rubles."

"And of that you are certain?"

"Just as certain as I am that this man stole 100 rubles! I will have him imprisoned."

Max the Widower quickly emptied his pockets. "I have nothing. Oh, beloved rabbi, believe me. You know me. Everyone knows me. I wouldn't steal a grain of wheat from anyone." Clutching his head, he moaned, "why did I ever find the wallet? Better I should have been struck blind before I saw it. Then I wouldn't be accused of being a thief."

Mr. Gelten laughed mockingly. "You can tell that to the police."

Rabbi Hallick eyed both men carefully and thoughtfully. "I think the problem is solved."

Mr. Gelten gripped his cane confidently and nodded in agreement. "That's better. Now you see the truth of what I was saying."

"Mr. Gelten," said the rabbi, "I'm sorry but I cannot help you —"

"What? What did you say?"

"I am sorry, but I cannot help you."

"Just give me my wallet."

"Oh, no. I do not have your wallet," said the rabbi firmly, while taking another sip of tea.

Mr. Gelten stepped forward. "Are you mad? My wallet is right there in your lap."

"This cannot be your wallet."

"Not my wallet? You *are* mad."

"You said your wallet had 500 rubles in it." The rabbi's words were even, clear. "You swore to it in front of all these witnesses. This wallet has only 400 rubles, so it cannot be yours. The difference in the amount is great, as you yourself said, so much so that there must be two wallets!"

"Two wallets?" gasped Mr. Gelten and the villagers.

"Of course, two wallets," said the rabbi, as if surprised at their obtuseness. "You said *your* wallet was stolen. *This* wallet was obviously lost. Again we have a tremendous difference, for something that is stolen cannot be lost!" The rabbi motioned to Max the Widower. "The wallet is yours, for you found it, and you are not a thief, and that is the most important difference."

Mr. Gelten glared at the rabbi in disbelief and horror, while everyone congratulated the widower for his fortune. Max, poor and honest soul that he was, was overwhelmed, but not beyond being able to reason. He brushed his well-wishers aside, and turned to Mr. Gelten. "Believe me most honorable Sir, I did not wish it this way." And then to the rabbi he said, "For everything there is a reason. Why, why, was I the one to find the wallet?"

With the gentle patience of true knowledge, the rabbi said, "Max, neither fortune nor misfortune should be probed. Our blessed Torah tells us, 'In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider. God made the one as well as the other.' Therefore let us accept what happened as being for the best," and he paused enigmatically before adding, "*best for the entire community.*"

Such a noble response was beyond Max's comprehension. "Rabbi, what do I know of such things as 'best for the entire community?' You are our rabbi. You use the rubles as you think best."

Rabbi Halick nodded appreciatively. "Thank you, but it is your money."

"Then I give it to you as my contribution for all the good things you have done for me and our community."

The villagers applauded and envied his generosity, never for a moment thinking that because he had found someone else's money it was any less his.

The rabbi blessed Max for his thoughtfulness and trust, and without a moment's hesitation turned to Mr. Gelten, who still had not found his tongue. "You have heard the conditions under which I was given these rubbles. Now they are mine and I have control over them." Slowly his eyes hardened and he took a deep breath. "I know of nothing better than to donate them to you, so as to insure the peace of our village, and to speed your exit from it, with God's blessing!"

what's new in crime

by Stefan Santesson

There has been a very special charm to the Mr. and Mrs. North novels by Frances and Richard Lockridge which, notwithstanding my frequent references to socio-documentary elements in this field, I am the first to recognize and to delight at. There are perhaps a half-dozen writers whose books one always looks forward to with particular anticipation, not necessarily because these novels will seem to be an extrapolation of the headlines you at times wish you could forget but simply because these books, you know, will give you pleasure; you will be able to relax as you find, in time, you can do with too few friends; perhaps you will even find yourself chuckling and, in these days, this is something of an achievement.

Frances and Richard Lockridge's often imitated but seldom equalled Pamela and Gerald North novels had that very special quality and MURDER BY THE CLOCK (Lippincott, $3.50) has the characteristic ease and charm of the earlier novels. One reviewer has written that the Lockridges "are astute and civilized professionals

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Mr. Santesson continues his column on recent novels, somewhat curtailed these last months due to lack of space. The writer, editor of the SMM since 1956, formerly edited the Unicorn Mystery Book Club.

who still write as if it were fun" and there is a good deal of truth to this. You find yourself wondering therefore what effect the passing of Frances Lockridge will have on subsequent Pam and Jerry North novels — if there are to be any. Will Pam continue to have that very logically zany approach to life — and to murder — which she has, there in Key West in this book, or will there be an imperceptible change. It will be interesting to see, but I cannot resist, at this time, in expressing my appreciation, as a reader, of the pleasure the Pam and Jerry North novels always gave me over the years.

Victor Canning's BLACK FLAMINGO (William Sloane, $3.95) is the latest novel by the author of THE GOLDEN SALAMANDER, THE MAN FROM . "THE TURKISH SLAVE," etc. Mr. Canning, as do so many these days, turns to Central Africa for the scene of this latest adventure novel. Mabenge, the Oxford educated chief of the Azandes, will perhaps remind some of Emperor Jones, but this *is* an over- simplification of a reality with which the new governments in Central Africa are having to cope these days and which this novel ignores. The ambitions of the Mabenges of Africa are more complex than this novel suggests. There is a greater degree of political sophistication and considerably less need for the sort of guidance upon which Mabenge relies. This, I am afraid, is most definitely not the Central Africa which we have come to know something about in more recent years.

Rochester's Amber Dean writes about her own home town in DEADLY CONTACT (Doubleday, $3.50), the adventures of two post office employees as they search for the answer to who had wanted to kill one of them, and why! Pleasant characterizations. Do read this.

It is inevitable that someone should write about the terrorists who, for so many reasons, brought the warfare in Algeria into the streets and into the cafes of Paris. Paul Brickhill's WAR ON NERVES (William Morrow, $3.75) has an American tourist with a very special interest in the France that did not surrender, a man who is something of a knowledgeable innocent, thrown into this conflict between the partisans in yesterday's struggle for independence in Algeria. Possibly because so much more was involved than this novel suggests, I at least found the novel pleasane enough — but far from "chilling."

death at midnight

by Richard Deming

Gold lettering on the plate-glass front of the tavern reads HABER'S STAG BAR, GENTLEMEN ONLY.

Officer Michaels, examining the inscription, said, "The last stronghold of masculine independence. Where else but in America would you find a strictly stag bar?

They don't need 'em anywhere else," Sergeant Hoffman growled. "Nobody but Americans let their women push them around so much that they have to have places to get away from them."

"Well, at least we know one thing. The corpse can't be female."

"About all," the sergeant said. "I never listened to such a mixed-up guy over the telephone."

The two policemen entered the tavern and stood looking over the half dozen men assembled there. Two were leaning against the bar, the other four sat together at a table. There were no drinks before any of them, because it was after the closing hour. Apparently they had all simply waited for the police to arrive.

"Okay," Sergeant Hoffman

Someone once wrote how "Death has many faces . . .," and there is some point to remembering this as you read this story by Richard Deming, veteran mystery writer who has appeared several times previously in this magazine. There are many ways in which one can kill, and in which one can be the instrument of Death. Here is the oldest way—as old as Man. . . . *H.S.S.*

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rasped. "Which one of you guys phoned in?"

An enormously fat man seated at the table said, "I did."

"Who're you?"

"My name's George Haber. I'm the owner."

"All right. What's happened here?"

The fat man took out a handkerchief and rubbed the back of his neck. "I don't know exactly, officer," he said in a tired voice. "I wasn't here when it happened.

"Over the phone you said something about a murder."

"I was a little upset," Haber said apologetically. "In a way it was murder and in a way it wasn't."

A squat, thick-chested young man seated at the table said sententiously. .."Death can be moral murder without being legal murder. And vice versa."

The sergeant stared at the young man for a moment, then turned back to the owner. "You got a murder here or not?" he demanded.

"We've got a dead man," George Haber said. "You'll have to figure out how to list it."

Heaving himself to his feet, the fat man waddled toward the back room. "We laid him out on the back table, where he'd be out of sight. Just follow me."

At eight A.M., George Haber slipped a key into the front door of the tavern, then stopped to peer at the outside thermometer before opening it. The thermometer read ninety.

St. Louis weather, the tavern keeper thought. By noon it would be a hundred and ten. They ought to drop August from the calendar.

Air conditioning made the inside seem almost cold in relation to outdoors. Haber moved ponderously toward the wall thermostat, his three hundred odd pounds of sagging fat causing the wooden floor to creak. Peering at the thermostat, he saw it was set for seventy-three. Shrugging, he left the setting as it was and entered the back room.

A slim featherweight of a man was asleep on a back-room table. He lay on his side in a prenatal position, head pillowed on his hands. The man wore a wrinkled sport shirt and blue dungerees. His shoes, a cracked but well-shined pair of loafers, were side-by-side beneath the table. One of his worn blue socks was carefully darned at the heel, the other at the toe. There was a half-pint bottle in his right hip pocket.

The tavern proprietor gave the little man a mildly sharp slap on the rump. With a start the man sat up and swung his legs over the side of the table.

It was hard to judge the little man's age. His black hair had

only a bare touch of gray in it, but his seamed and wrinkled face looked a dissipated sixty. In contrast to both, his body possessed the slim, nervous grace of a teen-age dancer.

"Time to get up, Flea," Haber announced unnecessarily.

The little man's cheeks twitched. Reaching for his hip, he pulled out the half-pint bottle and worriedly focused his eyes on it. It contained about two inches of gin. Uncapping the bottle, he tilted it empty, squished the liquor over his teeth before swallowing.

"Ah-h," he said with satisfaction.

"Some night you're going to forget to save an eye-opener," George Haber growled. "You'll wake up in the morning, reach for an empty bottle and drop dead."

The little man bounced from the table, slipped into his shoes and carried the empty bottle out into the main room. He dropped it into a trash can beneath the bar. Then he began lifting down the stools and chairs inverted on top of the bar, placing the stools before the bar and the chairs at tables.

George Haber waddled behind the bar, produced a key ring and unlocked the steel-latticed grill which guarded the back bar's liquor supply. After sliding apart the doors of the grill, he used another key to open the padlock on the beer taps. Then he composed himself to await business by sitting on a low box behind the bar so that just his head showed above the counter. In that position he resembled a benevolent water-headed dwarf.

The Flea put the last chair in place and said, "Guess I'll wash up, George."

The fat man merely nodded. The Flea walked into the back room and disappeared through a door marked: *Ladies*. The sign was a holdover from the original business owner, who had catered to both sexes. Fifteen years ago, when he had bought the tavern, George Haber had scraped the gold lettering from the front window, which read *Koenig's Tavern, Ladies Welcome,* and had substituted the wordage there now. But he had never bothered to change the rest-room sign.

The front door opened to admit a stock man with a slight paunch and rust-colored hair. He came in with a rush and a wide grin on his plump face.

Slamming a palm on the bar, he boomed, "Where's your father, little boy?" then pretended to do a double-take. "Oh, that's you, George. I thought you were standing up."

A smile slowly formed on the tavern proprietor's face, lifting enormous jowls with it. His lips spread to expose horselike teeth

and his eyes completely disappeared in folds of flesh. As slowly as it had formed the smile faded. His face resumed its habitual deadpan expression.

Heaving himself erect, he said, "Morning, Hank. First customer, one on the house." He reached for a highball glass.

The rusty-haired man said, "For years I've waited to hear them sweet words. A double Haig and Haig."

"You'll get thirty cent bar whisky and like it."

The man sighed. "Good whisky would probably burn a hole in my stomach anyway. Gimme some of that slop I sell." Drawing out a handkerchief, he ran it over the back of his neck. "Gonna be a real scorcher today, isn't it?"

"Yeah," Haber said. He poured a single shot of whisky into the glass, added ice and soda. For himself he poured a glass of mineral water.

"Bumps," the rusty-haired man said, raising his glass.

When both men had drunk, the rusty-haired man asked, "Need any stock?"

"Case of bourbon, half a case of gin, couple of dozen half pints for the Flea."

The whisky salesman drew a small pad from his inside breast pocket and made a note of the order. "Hasn't that joker drunk himself to death yet?"

"He lives on it," Haber said. "A quart a day, regular as clockwork. The only thing that would ever kill him would be cutting him off."

"Who ever named him the Flea, George? It sure fits."

"His name's Frank Leroy Etherton," the barkeeper said. "F.L.E. It came about sort of natural."

The salesman took another sip of his drink. "Is it true the Flea was almost a priest once?"

"He had a year in a seminary. That's hardly almost. I think it takes five or six."

"Still, it's some comedown. You've got to have some brains to get into a seminary. From that to bar room flunky. He even sleeps here, doesn't he?"

"In the back room," Haber said. "It's better than a park bench. In fact a hell of a lot better. He's got his own private bath."

When the liquor salesman raised his eyebrows, Haber said, "The ladies' room. He keeps his toothbrush and shaving stuff in there. Takes baths in the sink, even washes his clothes and hangs them in there. If a woman ever wandered into the place, she'd wonder what the hell was going on."

The Flea came from the back room, freshly shaved, his cracked shoes newly polished, wearing a clean sport shirt and a clean pair of dungarees.

"Morning, Flea," the rusty-

haired Hank said. "I was just going to buy a drink."

The Flea looked interested, but George Haber said in a definite voice, "He don't drink except what I give him."

The little man looked resigned rather than disappointed. In a polite tone he said, "Thanks, Mr. Braddock, but I haven't had breakfast yet?"

"I thought gin *was* your breakfast," Hank Braddock said with a wide grin.

Then he caught the displeased frown of the tavern proprietor and said deprecatingly, "Just kidding, Flea."

The little man gave him a nervous smile and walked on into the kitchen. A few moments later there was the sound of something hissing on the grill.

"Hamburger," Haber said. "Three times a day. He ain't eaten another god-damned thing in five years. He wouldn't eat that if I didn't make him. He used to try to get around me by throwing them away after they were cooked and pretending he'd eaten in the kitchen. Now I make him sit at the bar where I can watch him eat."

"Why do you bother?"

"Aw, I get my money's worth out of him," Haber said with the gruffness of a man who disliked being accused of soft-heartedness. "He does enough work around here to pay his keep."

The door opened to admit the second customer of the day. Built square, like a cigar box, the man's stomach bulged magnificently and sagged just enough to make him lean backward when he walked. He had a high, flat forehead, a button nose and heavy cheeks with sagged like his stomach. His eyes, huge and Irish blue, bugged out with a kind of innocent ferocity, suggesting a kindly nature which he took some pains to cover up by bluster.

"Morning, Senator," Haber greeted him.

The title caused Hank Barddock to stare at the newcomer curiously.

"Hot out," the man said. "A real thirsty day. I'll have a beer.

As the barkeep drew the beer, he said, "You know the senator, Hank?"

The whisky salesman shook his head.

"He ain't really a senator. It's just a nickname. Everybody around here's got nicknames." He placed the beer on the bar.

"Senator, meet Hank Braddock. Hank, this is Alderman Mike Fitzpatrick."

The two men solemnly shook hands. When Haber reached for the fifteen cents the alderman laid on the bar, Braddock gestured for him to leave it alone. He laid down a dollar bill.

"Out of here, George," he instructed. "Another for me, and another mineral water for you,

if you can stand it."

The barkeep mixed a highball, poured himself a second glass of mineral water and rang up fifty-five cents out of the dollar.

The Flea came from the kitchen with a hamburger sandwich on a paper plate. Nodding to Alderman Fitzpatrick, he set the plate on the bar and began eating the sandwich.

"Give the Flea a coffee cup full of gin to wash that down with," Fitzpatrick said, drawing a five-dollar bill from his wallet. "I know he won't drink coffee."

"He don't want no cup of gin," Haber said.

"Sure he does," the alderman insisted, letting his huge eyes bug at the bartender. "Fill up a coffee cup. I'll pay for it."

The Flea stopped chewing to give George Haber a waiting look.

"Eat your damned sandwich," Haber growled. "He's just trying to get a rise out of you. He knows I won't let him buy you a drink."

Fitzpatrick roared with laughter, his pendulous belly undulating like a bowl of Jello. "See the expression on his face?" he asked the whisky salesman. "He'd sit there and sip gin out of a cup between bites just like you or me would sip coffee. When's the last time you tasted any liquid except gin, Father Etherton?"

The little man sat perfectly still for a moment. Then he resumed eating his sandwich.

"Tell you what," the alderman said. "You recite one of Shakespeare's sonnets for us and I'll buy you a half pint."

"Leave him alone," Haber said gruffly.

"Father — I mean the Flea is a real educated man," Fitzpatrick said to the whisky salesman. "He can spout Shakespeare by the hour. He's a very talented performer, too. He can sing, he can dance, and he can walk on his hands. You catch him thirsty enough and he'll do any or all of them for a drink. Won't you, Father — I mean Flea?"

The Flea swallowed the last of his sandwich. He said nothing and he didn't look at anyone. A slight flush on his face was the only indication that he had heard.

George Haber unlocked a drawer in the backbar, lifted out a half pint of gin and set it before the Flea with a thump not quite hard enough to shatter the bottle. He looked angry. Silently the Flea picked up the bottle and headed for the ladies' room.

"Why you always want to spoil the fun, George?" the alderman complained. "What the hell difference does it make if he sings for his drinks? He don't mind."

"He works for his drinks," Haber said in a definite tone. "He's entitled to his dignity like any-

body else. Why do you want to make some kind of a dunce out of him?"

Fitzpatrick shook his head without understanding. "He is a dunce. Without you making him eat and portioning out his drinks like he's a baby, he'd be dead in a week. Why the hell do you want to bother?"

"Why do you want to see him dead?" Haber countered.

The alderman looked at George curiously, it just registering on him that the tavern proprietor was actually angry. "Hell, I haven't got anything against the Flea, don't you?"

"Who else has he got?" Haber inquired.

By the time the Flea returned from the ladies' room, the liquor salesman had finished his second drink and had left. There was a youthful bounce to the little man's walk and a sparkle in his eyes.

"Hope you saved enough to last you until noon," Haber snapped at him. "You ain't getting your second until you've ate another sandwich."

"I only had a little one, George."

"I'll bet. About half the bottle. Better tap a keg. Number two ran dry on the senator's beer."

The Flea scurried to the basement door and disappeared downstairs.

By noon the Flea had performed a dozen odd chores, any of which the tavern keeper could have done himself, but which would have required rising from his box. Haber resented having to get up from the box behind the bar for any reason other than waiting on customers.

The Flea's work consisted of such things as bringing soda and bottled beer from the basement, frying an occasional hamburger for a customer, washing glasses and generally keeping the place tidy. His important work never came until after the closing hour, when he nightly cleaned the men's room, inverted all the chairs and stools atop the bar, swept the entire place and mopped it. This was really his only assigned duty in the tacit agreement between himself and the tavern owner. He performed the odd daytime chores simply because he was there and available. He had no designated hours of work, being free to come and go as he pleased. He rarely left the tavern, however, unless sent on some errand by George Haber.

Periodically the Flea made visits to the ladies' room. At noon he carried the empty half-pint bottle behind the bar and dropped it into the trash can.

When he had fried himself a second hamburger and had eaten it, Haber doled him out a second half pint of gin.

Because of the heat, custom was fairly brisk all day. But up

until five it was quick-turnover business, most customers popping in for one quick drink and to absorb a little air-conditioned atmosphere, then leaving again. Five was the beginning of what the Stag Bar called "the cocktail hour," because from five to six draft beer was a dime and bar whisky twenty-five cents.

The first patrons to arrive for the cocktail hour were a couple of young men respectively about twenty and twenty-five years old. The younger, straight and well-built, wore horn-rimmed glasses, a college fraternity ring and a practiced air of cynicism. The other was a squat, thick-chested man who looked as though he might be a professional wrestler, but in actuality was a high school English teacher. The teacher's name was Burchard Alden. The younger man was Daniel Fitzer.

Both glanced at the wall clock to make sure it was five P.M. before laying a dime each on the bar.

Sliding beers before them, Haber said, "Hi, Danny. Afternoon, Professor. Getting any cooler out?"

Danny said, "Your thermometer reads one-ten, if you call that cool. Ought to be good for business."

The tavern keeper nodded. "The place will be jumping tonight. And it's Joe's night off. Hope Harry can handle it."

"Who's Harry?" Burchard Alden asked.

"The new extra bartender I hired to work Joe's night off. He's going to get a real initiation."

The Flea came from the back room, moving his cheeks in and out. After several movements, he swallowed. The two young men observed this phenomenon with interest.

"He had a mouthful of gin," Haber explained. "About this time of day he starts enjoying the taste. He holds off swallowing as long as he can."

The Flea said in a friendly voice, "Hi, Professor. Hi, Danny. How's college?"

"I don't go in the summer," Danny said with amusement.

"Oh, yeah," the Flea said. "You'll graduate next year, won't you?"

"If I pass."

"You stick to it," the Flea said seriously. An education is important these days. Isn't that right, Professor?"

"I'm devoting my life to that proposition," the teacher said with mock solemnity.

Art Schaefer, the plumber, came in wearing work clothes, his shoes caked with clay from some ditch he had worked in. He was a tall, leanly hard man in his forties with a loud voice and laughing eyes. He nearly knocked the Flea over by slamming an oversized palm between

the little man's shoulder blades.

"Evening, fellow drunk," he boomed. "Step up and I'll buy a drink." He threw a crumpled wad of four one-dollar bills on the bar. "Boilermaker and a helper, George. One for the Flea, and put Danny and the Professor in too."

Haber placed a shot and a beer before the plumber and second beers before Danny Fitzer and Burchard Alden. He simply ignored the order of a drink for the Flea. Apparently Schaefer had meant it merely as a joke, for he made no objection to the Flea being left out.

The Flea was having some trouble recovering from the unexpected slap on the back, which had driven the wind from him. For a few moments he clung to the bar, gasping and choking. When his breathing finally returned to normal, he gave the plumber a reproachful look and retreated to the back room.

"You're too damn rough, Art," Haber said. "The Flea only weighs about ninety-eight pounds."

Schaefer grinned at him.

Danny Fitzer said, "Know why everybody picks on the Flea?"

Haber said, "Wish I did," and Art Schaefer said, "'Cause he's too little to fight back."

The college student shook his head. "With all our talk of equal rights, we have a caste system in this country. We automatically categorize people in relation of our social and economic positions. Some we place above us, some on the same level, some below. It's important to our self-image to have a lot of the last category to look down upon."

The plumber tossed off his shot, chased it with a sip of beer and rapped the shot glass on the bar in signal that he wanted another. "What the hell's a self-image? You're talking out of books again."

"A lot of wisdom comes from books," Danny said reasonably. "Society needs whipping boys such as the Flea in order to support the great middle-class ego. He's the untouchable of the Stag Bar, the only one *all* of us know is below us socially and economically."

The plumber watched as Haber filled his whisky glass. "If we do whatever you said we do to other people—rate 'em high or low or even with us, where do you and me and the Professor stand?"

"We can feel culturally superior to you because we have more formal education," Danny said easily. "You can feel economically superior to us because you earn more money. So we each have to look down one way and up the other. With most people it's that way. You envy some immigrant shoemaker because he's built a fortune, but at

the same time you feel superior to him because you get invited to dances at the country club and he doesn't."

"I never been invited to a dance at a country club in my life," Schaefer said.

"You know what I mean, Art. Most people you consider beneath you in the scheme of things have at least some quality that makes them superior in a single area. But we all know we're superior to the Flea in every way. So we're indulgent to him, we tease him, sometimes we're cruel to him in order to demonstrate our total superiority to at least one person. We like the Flea around for the same reason a whore keeps a pimp. We can look at him and think, 'At least one person in the world is lower than I am'."

"You're a little nuts," Schaefer said. He tossed off his second shot and rapped the bar again.

Burchard Alden said, "A nice glib argument, Danny, but I don't think it explains the Fleas of this world. To me he represents the futile striving of all humanity, the endless marching toward a goal that isn't there."

Danny said, "You mean a Christ figure?"

George Haber snorted and moved up the bar to attend to a pair of newly-arrived customers. Schaefer guffawed and said, "You think the Flea is Christ in disguise? You're both nuts."

"I don't mean a Christ figure at all," the teacher said. "I think he epitomizes the uselessness of humanity's struggle. We're all on an endless treadmill leading to nowhere. We think we've attained success when we acquire a new car, an eight-room house and membership in Rotary. But who in all history has ever really accomplished anything in a cosmic sense?"

"Maybe not the average man," Danny conceded. "But some men have shaken the world."

"Who? Alexander the Great? Where's his empire today? Genghis Khan? Where's his? Even the men history calls great have done little more than stir a momentary ripple in the river of time. Their works begin to disappear, their influence on the world to dissipate the moment they die."

"How about Thomas Edison?" Schaefer put in.

The young English teacher made a dismissing gesture. "Gadgetry. Mankind is no happier because of the incandescent lamp than it is because of television. Or, for that matter, because of the invention of the wheel. Each time technical progress makes our life easier, the benefits are cancelled out by an increase in neuroses. We strive for goals, but the only goal we ever really reach is

the grave. The Flea is wiser than the rest of us. He realizes there is nowhere to go, and has given up trying."

Danny grinned. "The only true philosopher, huh?"

"He and his kind."

Art Schaefer straightened away from the bar. "I've got somewhere to go. To the can." With a huge guffaw, he headed for the men's room.

At six o'clock, the end of the cocktail hour, the bar was jammed. Fifteen minutes later, with the price of drinks back to normal, it was empty except for George Haber, the Flea and Art Schaefer. Haber resumed his seat on the low box while the Flea washed glasses.

"Ain't you going home to dinner again, Art?" Haber asked.

"When I get ready."

"If I was your wife, I'd kill you, the way you let her stand there for hours keeping things warm."

"You ain't my wife, George. If you was, I'd never come home to a face like that. Pour me another shot."

Haber heaved to his feet, filled the whisky glass and rang up thirty cents of the change lying before the plumber. Then he sat down again.

At twenty-five after six a thin, pale man with mousey blond hair and horn-rimmed glasses entered the tavern, nodded to George and walked behind the bar.

George said: "Aprons are in that drawer nearest the window, Harry."

Opening the designated drawer, the extra bartender took out a folded bar apron and tied it around his waist.

"The prices are all posted on that card over the cash register," Haber said. "If you can't find something, the Flea will tell you where it is. Flea, meet Harry Waters."

The Flea lay down the glass he was washing, dried his hands on a bar towel and advanced to hold out his hand. "How are you, Mr. Waters?" he said politely.

The pale man gave the proffered hand a jerky squeeze, immediately dropped it again. "Hello, Flea."

"And this is Art Schaefer," Haber said, nodding toward the plumber. "One of our best customers. When he gets too drunk, throw him out."

Harry Waters grinned and the plumber said, "You'd have to call in the marines. Or else have the Flea do it." He chuckled at his own wit.

Haber said: "Soon as the Flea finishes washing them glasses, he'll make himself a hamburger. Make him eat it in front of you. If you don't, he'll throw the damn thing in the garbage and tell you he ate it. When he's

got it down, he gets a half pint out of there." He pointed to the drawer where the Flea's supply of gin was kept. "At eleven P.M. he gets another. That's it. Nobody buys him drinks and you don't give him none on the house. Understand?"

Harry Waters nodded. "I got it."

Haber pushed himself up off the low box. "Tonight'll probably be rough, with this heat. Probably some of the regulars won't want to leave at two thirty."

"Don't look at me," Schaefer said. "I'm going home soon as I have one more."

"Sure," the tavern owner said. "You'll be arguing with Harry for one more five minutes after closing time." He turned back to the extra bartender. "I'll stop by just before closing to help you clean the place out."

"Fine. I think I can handle things, but the first night I'd rather have you lock up."

Haber waddled from behind the bar and moved toward the front door. Pausing with it open, he said over his shoulder, "Go make your supper, Flea. And don't try to pull nothing. You eat at the bar."

"Sure, George," the Flea said. "I always do, don't I?"

Haber went out and let the door swing shut behind him.

The first evening customer, aside from Art Schaefer, came in at seven o'clock. After that they drifted in regularly. By nine o'clock, every bar stool and table was full and a second row of patrons stood at the bar.

Fortunately for the new bartender, the Stag Bar's custom was not a mixed-drink crowd. About the most complicated drink ordered was an occasional gin and tonic, and otherwise it was simply a matter of drawing beer and pouring whisky. By drafting the Flea as a glass washer, Waters was able to keep up with the demand.

Periodically, whenever he was caught up on his glass washing, the Flea made a trip to the ladies' room, always returning with his cheeks moving in and out as he swished gin over his teeth in order to savor the last bit of taste before swallowing. At eleven he carried the empty bottle behind the bar, dropped it in the trash can and looked expectantly at Harry.

Glancing at the clock, the barkeep took a half pint from the Flea's private drawer and gave it to him.

By then things had pretty well settled down. At two of the tables, pinochle games were in progress. At a third young Danny Fitzer and schoolteacher Burchard Alden played cribbage for beers. Four men crowded around the bowling machine playing low-man-buys. Art Schaefer still sat at the end of the bar

hoisting boilermakers. Everyone in the place at the moment had a full glass.

"I'm going in the back room for a while," the Flea told Waters. "If you get in a jam, wake me up."

The bartender raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"His evening nap," Art Schaefer explained a trifle thickly. "The Flea knocks off an hour's sleep about this time every night."

Waters shrugged.

Going into the back room, the Flea sat on the long table and uncapped his final half-pint. He took a moderate pull at the bottle, swished the liquid over his teeth as he recapped it, finally swallowed. Thrusting the bottle into his hip pocket, he reached up and pulled the light cord, which hung directly over the table. Then he lay on his side and promptly went to sleep.

In the outer room several customers left and several more came in. Shortly after eleven thirty, Alderman Mike Fitzpatrick entered, his huge stomach thrust out before him like the scraper blade of a bulldozer. He found standing place at the end of the bar next to Art Schaefer.

"Evening, Senator," the plumber said. "Harry, give the senator a drink on me." He drew a pair of crumpled bills from his pocket and dropped them on the bar.

"Just a beer," the fat man said.

When the beer was in front of him and Waters had walked away, the alderman asked, "Who's the new bartender?"

"Name's Harry," Schaefer said.

"Luck," Fitzpatrick said, raising his glass. He glanced around. "Where's the Flea?"

"Taking his evening nap. It makes that last bottle last longer."

The fat man grinned. "Wonder how many years it is since the Flea tasted water?"

"I don't think he ever tasted it. He was weaned on gin. The shock of tasting water would probably kill him."

Then a slow smile formed on the plumber's face and grew to a delighted grin. "Hey, I just had an idea," he announced.

"Be kind to it," the alderman advised. "It's in a strange place."

Schaefer got up from his stool, lurching slightly. "Follow me, Senator. We're going to make a scientific experiment."

Fitzpatrick looked interested. Trailing the plumber to the rear of the room, he stood behind him as Schaefer quietly opened the door to the back room. Both men peered in. By the light flowing through the open door from the barroom they could see the Flea asleep on the table.

Schaefer tiptoed into the room and Fitzpatrick soundlessly fol-

lowed. Reaching across the Flea's prone body, the plumber eased the bottle from the little man's hip pocket. Holding a finger to his lips, he tiptoed toward the ladies room. He turned the knob slowly, so that there was no click. Because the light in the rest room was on, he opened the door only far enough to squeeze inside, not wanting light to shine in the Flea's face. Fitzpatrick had to push it considerably wider to accommodate his bulkier figure.

Inside, the plumber gently clicked the door shut. Then he uncapped the bottle and emptied it in the sink.

"Kind of a waste of good liquor, isn't it?" the alderman said in a low voice.

"Who likes gin?" Shaefer asked, grinning.

He filled the bottle to the same level with water and recapped it.

Fitzpatrick's face developed a smile as delighted as Shaefer's had been when the idea first struck him. "It's probably homicide," he whispered. "The shock may stop his heart."

The two men slipped from the ladies' room as quietly as they had entered. The Flea didn't even stir when Schaefer eased the bottle back into his hip pocket. They tiptoed back into the barroom.

Instead of closing the back room door completely, Schaefer left it open about four inches, which was enough to cast a band of light from the barroom across the sleeping man's chest without shining into his face.

Back at their places at the bar, the funniness of their practical joke got the best of them. Fitzpatrick started to chuckle and the plumber roared with laughter.

Naturally those nearest them at the bar wanted to know what the joke was.

Spluttering, hardly able to control himself, Schaefer gasped, "We filled — we filled the Flea's bottle with water. When he — wakes up and reaches for an eye-opener —" Unable to finish, he dissolved in a paroxysm of laughter.

The joke traveled along the bar and over to the tables. Within five minutes everyone in the place knew about it. One-by-one, grinning widely, every patron tiptoed to the back room door and peered in at the sleeping man.

Glancing at the wall clock, Fitzpatrick announced, "About five more minutes. He always wakes up about midnight."

There was no lack of lookouts to inform the conspirators when the moment of awakening came. As fast as one patron took his eye from the crack of the door, another moved into place. There was dead silence in the tavern, everyone's attention being con-

centrated on the back room.

At two minutes after twelve a whispering voice said, "He's sitting up."

Immediately Art Shaefer left his stool, went over to the back room door and pushed aside the man peering through the crack. "I'll take over," he growled. "I set the thing up."

The plumber put his eye to the crack just as the Flea reached overhead to pull the light cord. The Flea sat blinking for a moment, then pulled out his bottle and uncapped it. Tilting it, he took a long pull.

An expression of consternation crossed the little man's face. The bottle slipped from his fingers and shattered on the floor. Making a strangled noise, he raced for the ladies' room.

Art Schaefer slammed the door wide open and staggered after the Flea as far as the rest room door. Customers surged in after him until the back room wouldn't hold any more. One hand on either side of the rest room door, Schaefer howled with laughter at the sight of the Flea crouched over the bowl retching.

"It made him throw up!" he roared between guffaws. "How do you like that? Water's poison to him."

It was fifteen minutes before the place settled down. By then everyone had tired of the noises emanating from the ladies' room and had returned to the front room. The pinochle games started up again, Danny Fitzer and the schoolteacher were back playing cribbage, the other customers had resumed their former places. Still, everyone kept one anticipatory eye on the back room door, waiting for the Flea to emerge.

He finally came out, white-faced and sick looking, to be greeted by a general roar of laughter. Blinking, he made his way unsteadily to the bar and gave Harry a beseeching look.

"They dumped my bottle," he said. "It was almost full. Can I have another one?"

The place turned quiet, waiting for the bartender's reply. Sensing the temper of the crowd, the man went along with the joke. Grinning, he said, "George told me no extra drinks."

"But I didn't have any of that last one," the Flea protested. "In a special case like this George would let me have another."

"George ain't here, Flea. And I got my orders."

Alderman Fitzpatrick laid a five-dollar bill on the bar. "I'll buy him a drink, Harry. Pour out a double shot of gin." He winked at the bartender.

Waters pretended to look undecided, then shook his head. "George told me not to let customers buy him drinks either."

"Well then, just pour out a

double shot of gin for me. I'm not cut off."

The bartender pursued his lips, then shrugged. "I guess you can order what you want for yourself." Setting a two-ounce shot glass before the alderman, he poured it full.

The telephone, on the wall near the door rang at that moment. Someone answered it and called, "Art!"

"Doggone it," Schaefer said. I told that woman to stop phoning me at saloons."

He went over to the phone.

The Flea licked his lips and stared at the double shot of gin before Fitzpatrick.

"Thirsty, Flea?" the alderman asked.

The Flea glanced at him, then tentatively reached out a hand toward the glass. Fitzpatrick placed a palm over the top of it.

Across the room Art Schaefer boomed into the phone, "How can I come home, woman? I'm drunker'n a hedgehog. Want me to crack up driving?"

Fitzpatrick said, "I didn't buy this for you, Flea. You know George won't allow that. Didn't you hear me order it for myself?"

The Flea dropped his hand to his side. His cheeks began to twitch.

Schaefer said into the phone, "You come get me and I'll go home. Take the truck. The car will be all right parked here tonight."

Fitzpatrick removed his palm from the shot glass. "Tell you what, Father. I can't buy you a drink, but this gin is mine now. I paid for it. I could sell it to you."

"You know I don't have any money," the little man said unsteadily.

"Well, maybe I could let you earn it. You willing to work for it?"

The Flea's cheeks twitched again. He didn't say anything. There was dead silence in the tavern as every patron's attention centered on the conversation between the Flea and Fitzpatrick.

The silence was broken by Art Schaefer exploding. "How the hell can I teach you to drive a truck over the phone? Anybody who can drive a car can drive a truck. The shift is just a little different, is all."

Fitzpatrick said. "How about reciting a little piece, Father — I mean Flea."

The Flea's eyes flicked in all directions. "What kind of a piece?"

"Not Shakespeare. We're tired of that routine. How about something funny?"

"Can I have the drink first?" the Flea asked.

The alderman gave his head a slow shake. "I told you you have to earn it. Go ahead. Give

us a funny poem."

The little man took out a handkerchief and wiped the back of his neck. His gaze fixed on the glass of gin.

At the telephone Schaefer said, "The way it's parked in the driveway, you shift it north and west." There was a pause, then, West! Don't you know which way is west, woman? Shift it toward University City."

The Flea said, "Do you like Sam Johnson?"

"Never heard of him."

"Dr. Samuel Johnson. The fellow Boswell wrote about."

"Oh, that Sam Johnson," Fitzpatrick said. "I never knew he wrote anything. I thought he just talked, and Boswell took it down."

"He wrote a lot of things, including a dictionary," the Flea informed him. "Some of his stuff is pretty funny. Would one of his verses be all right?"

"Go ahead," Fitzpatrick said.

Across the room Schaefer said, "When you get going in low, shift it south toward Carondolet Park and east toward the river. After that it's just like a regular car."

The Flea straightened his shoulders and recited:

"If the man who turnips cries,
Cry not when his father dies,
'Tis a proof that he had rather
Have a turnip than his father."

There was mild applause from the patrons. At the table where the cribbage players sat, Burchard Alden said to Danny Fitzer, "Remarkable that he'd know an obscure piece of Johnson's such as that."

Art Schaefer said into the phone, "All right. Ten minutes. Hurry up, while I can still walk."

He hung up the phone and unsteadily moved back to the bar. "What's been happening?" he inquired of Fitzpatrick.

"The Flea just recited a poem."

"I didn't hear it."

"It wasn't long enough or funny enough anyway," Fitzpatrick said. "Give us a different one, Father — I mean Flea."

The Flea said somewhat desperately, "Can I have my drink first?"

"Not till you earn it. That was no poem. It was only one verse. Besides, Art didn't hear it. Start all over with something else."

The plumber said, "Aw, let the poor guy have his drink. He hasn't got anything in him at all, after throwing up. Pour me a nightcap too, Harry. The old lady's picking me up in a minute."

The Flea looked at Fitzpatrick hopefully, but the alderman

paid no attention to Schaefer's suggestion. "Come on, Flea," he said. "Start reciting."

Art Schaefer tossed off the shot Harry had just poured and drained his beer glass. He said in a noticeably thicker voice, "Whyn't you let the guy have his drink?"

"He hasn't earned it. Hurry up, Flea, or I'll drink it myself."

The Flea used his handkerchief on the back of his neck again, his gaze on the gin glass. "How about Bobbie Burns?"

"The bazooka player?"

Even in his unsettled state, the Flea managed a disgusted look. "The Scotch poet."

"Go ahead," the alderman encouraged.

Schaefer folded his arms on the bar and pillowed his head in them. The Flea straightened his shoulders again. "This is titled *Address to the Toothache,*" he announced. He recited:

"My curse upon your venom'd stang
That shoots my tortur'd gooms alang;
An' thro' my lug gies monie a twang,
Wi' gnawing vengeance,
Tearing my nerves wi' bitter pang,
Like racking engines!

"A' down my beard the slavers trickle!
I throw the wee stools o'er the mickle,
While round the fire the giglets keckle
To see me – – – "

"That's not even English," Fitzpatrick interrupted. "Who can understand it?"

The Flea's shoulders slumped.

Burchard Alden said to Danny, "Amazing. I have trouble reciting Burns myself, and I teach English Lit. I wish he had let him finish."

"I don't think you're in the mood to recite poetry tonight, Flea," Fitzpatrick said. "You're too nervous. Give us a little dance instead. I'll furnish the music." He began to whistle a lively version of *Turkey in the Straw* and clap his hands in time to it.

The Flea threw a hopeless look at the gin glass. Then he went into a makeshift combination of a jig and a tap dance. Someone else started to whistle and clap his hands. Others picked it up until the whole crowd, with the exceptions of the schoolteacher, the college student and the passed-out plumber, were whistling, clapping and stomping their feet.

The improvised music went on and on, the tempo gradually increasing and the little man's frenzied dancing speeding up to keep time with it. Finally he stumbled to a halt, fell against the bar for support and stood

there panting. The whistling and stomping faded away and died. The rhythmic clapping changed to applause.

"Attaboy, Flea," somebody called. "You put on a real floor show."

When the Flea had recovered his breath, he reached for the gin glass. Fitzpatrick dropped his palm across it again.

"You didn't finish the dance, Flea. The music was still going. Now you'll have to do something else."

The little man stared at him from stricken eyes.

From his table Alden called a trifle belligerently, "He earned it. Give it to him."

The alderman turned to let his prominent eyes bug at the schoolteacher. "Who's gin is this, Professor?"

"Oh, for cripes sake," Alden said, rising. He strode to the bar and tossed down a dollar bill "*I'll* buy a double shot of gin."

Fitzpatrick shook his head at the bartender. Someone said, "Quit trying to break up the floor show, Professor." A number of voices murmured assent.

The new bartender wasn't going to stick his neck out by siding with a minority of one in a strange place. He said, "Sorry, mister. I got orders not to let nobody buy drinks for the Flea."

Alden glared from him to Fitzpatrick. The fat man stared back at him stolidly. Someone called, "Sit down, Professor," and someone else said, "Down in front!"

The crowd picked that up and started to chant in unison, "Down in front! Down in front!"

The schoolteacher flushed. His expression suggested that if it had been merely a clash between himself and Fitzpatrick, he would have taken the gin glass from the fat man by force and have handed it to the Flea. But he wasn't quite able to press the matter in the face of unanimous opinion against him. Angrily he walked back to his table and sat down.

Fitzpatrick said, "Give us a handstand and you can have your gin, Flea. Honest to goodness, I won't make you do any more tricks."

The little man's expression grew hopeful. Backing from the bar, he flipped his feet in the air, landing on his hands. He balanced there, his slim body slightly arched, his feet exactly parallel to the floor.

The Alderman picked up the gin glass and set it on one of the Flea's heels.

The room exploded into mirth. The Flea held his stance for a few moments, his face turning redder and redder, as he tried to decide how to get the glass down without spilling it. Then he slowly lowered himself until his chest touched the floor, and

attempted to bring himself to a face-down position without letting his feet vary from their parallel position with the floor.

He almost made it. His knees started to bend at precisely the right instant and his calves were still straight up when his knees touched the floor. But he settled to a prone position with a slight jolt. The glass teetered and fell off. It bounced once, then rolled under a table.

The room turned deafening with laughter.

Bouncing to his feet, the Flea stared at the laughing mob from glassy eyes. Then, suddenly, he burst into tears. Turning, he rushed into the back room, slamming the door behind him.

The laughter gradually faded to an occasional titter, then died completely.

In an indulgent tone, Fitzpatrick said to the bartender, "Take out money for a half pint, Harry. When he comes back out, let him have it."

The barkeep took money from the change from the five dollar bill lying before the alderman and rang up the sale. Removing a half-pint bottle from the Flea's private drawer, he set it on the backbar.

The show over, the pinochle players turned back to their games, the bowlers dropped more coins in the bowling machine and simultaneously everybody began clamoring for refueling of their glasses. But before the bartender could even draw a beer, there was another distraction.

A rap at the front door turned everyone's attention that way. Outside, p e e r i n g in through the glass, stood a thin woman with mousey brown hair.

"Art's wife," Fitzpatrick said. He shook the plumber's shoulder. "Hey, Art!"

Schaefer didn't stir.

"Give me a hand," the alderman said to a bar customer. "We'll get him out to the truck."

Lifting him from the stool, they got one of the plumber's arms across each shoulder. Somebody held the door open and they went out with Schaefer dragging his feet between them.

Alderman Fitzpatrick came back in only long enough to pick up his change from the bar and leave again. Harry, busy filling glasses, completely forgot the Flea. Alden and Danny Fitzer, again engrossed in their cribbage game, didn't notice that the little man never returned from the back room. No one else noticed either.

By one-thirty the crowd had started to thin out. By two-fifteen, when George Haber came in to help the new bartender close up, the only customers at tables were the cribbage players and one pinochle game. Two men still sat at the bar.

"Everything go okay?" Haber asked the barkeep.

"Just fine."

"Where's the Flea?"

Harry Waters looked startled. He glanced at the half-pint of gin, still setting on the backbar. "Out back. Sleeping, I guess."

Haber waddled to the rear of the room, opened the door and looked in. His ponderous gait shook the floor as he moved into the back room and across to the ladies' room door. He pushed it opened.

Then he bellowed, "My God! Somebody come quick!"

Burchard Alden was the first to get there, with Danny Fitzer bringing up a close second. The rest of the customers and the barkeep crowded into the back room behind them.

They all clustered around the open rest-room, door peering in.

The Flea had looped his belt around a water pipe which hugged the ceiling. the other end was twisted around his throat and his feet dangled six inches from the floor.

"Now why would the poor little bastard do a thing like that?" George Haber breathed.

Everyone else there knew, but no one said a word.

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by A. N. Glennon

EVEN BEFORE he replaced the phone in the cradle, Tom Flynn thought he had this one figured out. The sailor had obviously gone AWOL, thinking the punishment, whatever it was, would be better than spending six months in the Mediterranean. Tom turned to Chief Evans, his Assistant Shore Patrol Officer.

"What's wrong with sailors, nowadays, Chief? Used to be, they joined the Navy to see the world; now they hate to even go aboard a ship."

"Another one over leave, Commander?"

"Right; a Fire Control Technician from the Porterfield. Ship's leaving for the Med, and this fellow missed the final muster. I suppose he'll turn up in a couple of days, with some wild story about how he tried as hard as he could to get there, but everything went against him."

"Don't these guys know they're all using the same story?"

"I guess not. This one had been trying to get leave, the Exec told me. They had to turn him down, and he was pretty downcast. He was all set to get married next month, then the Porterfield got one of these surprise schedule changes; they're

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Lt. Comdr. A. N. Glennon, author of THE GLASS NEEDLE (SMM, March 1962) returns with this short-short about the formidable Commander Flynn who finds, that time after time he must, in addition to his other duties—detect. . . .

going in place of the Somerset."

"That's the can that rammed the pier, isn't it?"

"Somerset? That's the one. She'll be in the yard a couple of months for repairs. Well, I copied down the man's description; let's have a few copies run off for the patrol. The ship put a straggler notice in the mail for us. That ought to get here this afternoon, and if we don't pick up the man earlier, we'll send it out in three days."

"Usual distribution?"

"Yes. Before I forget it, Evans, the Exec mentioned that this man is pretty clever. He's been headed for trouble before, but always manages to get off the hook, through some pretty fancy maneuvering. He won't fight us, but he'll try to outsmart us."

"I think I know how to handle a wise one, Commander."

"Okay, Chief. Anyhow, we've been warned."

Lost in the routine of day to day patrol operations, Tom proceeded to forget the missing sailor. A couple of days later, though, Evans approached him, looking at a scrap of paper in his hand.

"What do you make of this, Commander?"

The paper held a typewritten message: "We have finished with your sailor. He is safe. You will find him in a shed near the airport." Below the message was a crude diagram showing the location of the shed.

Tom frowned. "I don't get it. Who's finished with who?" He looked at the Chief. "How'd this get here, anyhow?"

"It came in the mail, sir. Had a Key West postmark, but it's just a cheap envelope, with no return address."

"I suppose we'd better go out and investigate. Tell the desk where we're going, then bring the sedan around."

Evans drove out to South Roosevelt Boulevard, slowing near the airport. The road to the abandoned shack was rutted and bumpy, disappearing completely about 100 yards from the grey, weatherbeaten shanty. Leaving the car, the two walked slowly toward the building. It had a single door, sagging away from its frame, and a single window, so dirty it probably transmitted no light inside. They circled the shack once, to see if anyone was nearby, then went to the door.

Tom looked at Evans, then pounded on the door. It sagged even more, but there was no reply. From inside, they heard only muffled groans and weak thuds. Tom threw his weight against the door and burst into the room. In the far corner, a sailor was spreadeagled on the floor, straining at the ropes which held him. Tom rushed to him, ripped the gag from his mouth, then gently untied him.

"Water," the man gasped.

"We'll get you water as soon as we can," Tom replied. "Come on, Evans, let's get him in the car."

Sagging between them, the man stumbled to the car. With Evans driving, Tom rubbed circulation back into the victim's arms and legs. As his condition improved, Tom began to question him.

"Who are you?"

"Martin, sir. Fire Controlman second, from USS Porterfield."

"Martin? Oh, yes. We put out straggler notices on you a couple of days ago. What happened to you?"

"Been in that shack for five days, sir. Couple of men kept me there, trying to get me to talk about some of the gear we have on the ship. They must have been spies, sir. You know, the Porterfield has some experimental stuff aboard. They must have heard about it."

"I wouldn't talk. They were scared to keep me too long; they didn't know the ship was leaving, and thought people'd be looking for me. They figured if they let me go, there wouldn't be much of a search for them."

"Did they feed you?"

"They fed me, all right. Only trouble was, they kept me tied up all the time, the way you found me. Wouldn't even let me feed myself."

"Couldn't you move at all?"

"Just a little. I got a little exercise every once in a while, to keep from stiffening up. I could lift my feet a little, and raise my arms off the floor. Thing that bothered me most was, I couldn't scratch when I itched."

"Well, you're all right now, Martin. Scratch yourself raw, if you want."

Martin smiled. "Funny thing, Commander, now that I can, I don't have to. Golly, I thought they were just going to leave me for good. They didn't say they'd let you know where I was."

"We got a note about eleven this morning."

Martin glanced at his watch. "You didn't waste much time getting out here, then. Thanks for getting me, sir."

"Part of my job Martin. I guess you're probably hungry, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir, I could sure stand a couple of hamburgers."

"We'll send out for some as soon as we get back to the Base. Then I'll send a message to your ship, and cancel your straggler's notice. Then, I'll want you to give me descriptions of the men who held you, and anything else you can tell me about them, so I can pass the word along to Naval Intelligence and the FBI."

"Swell, Commander . . . Gee, I forgot the ship'd be gone. What happens now? Do I get reassigned to another ship?"

"I doubt it, Martin. I think you'll be sent over to rejoin the Porterfield on the next ship that leaves."

Martin lost his eager look, and sat silently until they had returned to Shore Patrol Headquarters. Tom sent him to shave and clean up while food was being obtained, they called him to the office for questioning. In the middle of Martin's description of his captors, Tom snapped his fingers, then waved the man to silence.

"Martin," he said, "you're lying. You were just plain AWOL, and cooked up this story to try to avoid punishment. I suppose you hoped to get a transfer out of it."

Reddening, Martin said. "But, sir, how can you say that? You found me yourself. You saw how they'd treated me. What more do you need?"

"Look, Martin, according to your story, you were kept in that shack for five days, tied so tight you couldn't even scratch yourself. Yet, five minutes after we found you, you looked at your watch and commented that we'd made fast time out there. A wrist watch will run down in less than two days, Martin. If your story were true, you wouldn't have any idea of the time."

Martin paled, staring slack-jawed at Tom, then shrugged. "All right, sir. Guess this is one time I can't get away with it. You gotta admit it was a good try, though."

"A try, anyhow, Martin."

Evans returned after locking Martin into a cell. He smiled slyly at Tom, and put the manila envelope containing Martin's personal effects on Tom's desk.

"I thought this fellow was supposed to be smart," Evans said. "Weren't we warned that he was tricky?"

Tom looked up, puzzled by his tone. "Well, this fake kidnapping is about as tricky an AWOL alibi as I've seen."

Evans laughed. "It was so tricky, he hadn't even worried that you might catch on to it. He really fell for that direct approach of yours, though."

"Fell for it, Evans?"

"Sure. You shook him up so much with your accusation, he forgot he'd said he could move his arms a little bit."

"What's that got to do with it?"

Evans reached into the envelope and pulled out Martin's watch. Sliding it across the desk, he said. "Take a look, Commander, it's self-winding."

(Continued from other side)

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